# NOW AND THEN

Volume 5, Number 1

Spring, 1988

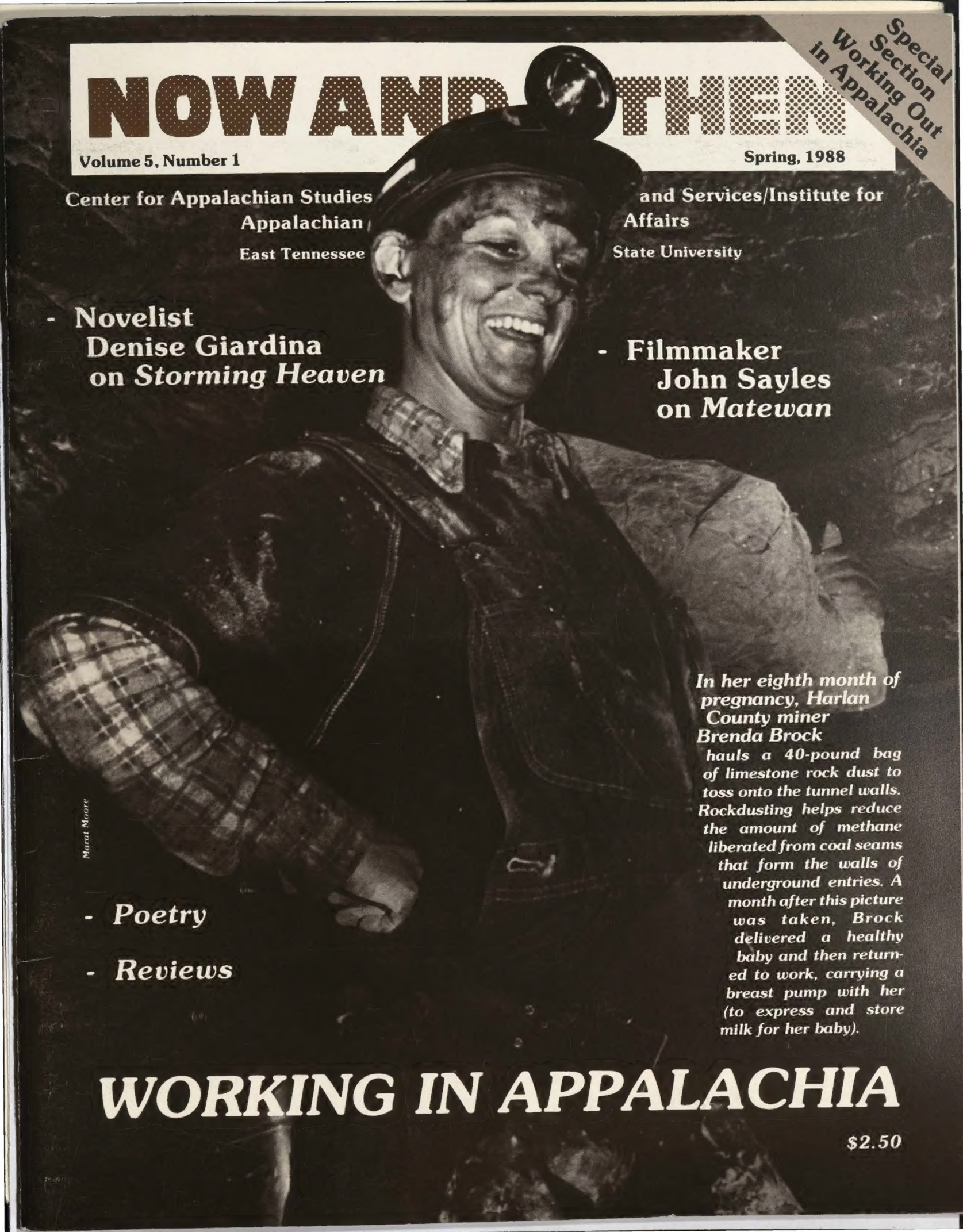
Center for Appalachian Studies and Services/Institute for Appalachian Affairs

East Tennessee State University

Special Section Working Out in Appalachia

- Novelist Denise Giardina on *Storming Heaven*

- Filmmaker John Sayles on *Matewan*



Marat Moore

*In her eighth month of pregnancy, Harlan County miner Brenda Brock hauls a 40-pound bag of limestone rock dust to toss onto the tunnel walls. Rockdusting helps reduce the amount of methane liberated from coal seams that form the walls of underground entries. A month after this picture was taken, Brock delivered a healthy baby and then returned to work, carrying a breast pump with her (to express and store milk for her baby).*

- *Poetry*

- *Reviews*

# *WORKING IN APPALACHIA*

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*Ken Murray*

***"Now, I didn't make no baskets back when I was able to work. Maybe one now and then to use. Just now and then. I didn't have time to look at a basket. Needed one, made it. Or somebody, one of the neighbors wanted one, I'd maybe make one."***

**Jesse Jones, 80, has spent most of his life working his Scott County, Va., farm. During the last 15 years, he's cut back on his farming and begun devoting more time to the only slightly less physically demanding process of producing fine Appalachian white oak baskets. Jones fells the white oaks he needs, prepares the splits and does all the final weaving. His work has been featured in John Rice Irwin's *Baskets and Basket Makers in Southern Appalachia.***

# Now and Then Editorial Board


- **Mary Chiltoskey** was the editor of our "Cherokee" edition. She has been a teacher and librarian in Cherokee, N.C., for more than 40 years. Over the years she has collected folklore, which she has published in books including *Cherokee Cooklore* and *Cherokee Plants and Their Uses*.
- **Fred Waage** teaches English at East Tennessee State University. He is the author of two chapbooks: *Minestrone* and *End of the World: California Stories*. He has served on the publishing staff of the Friends of the Earth, published and edited the literary magazine *Second Growth* and is founding editor of *Now and Then*.



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*SBR No. 130-024-87*


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**NOW AND THEN**

Great issues coming up!

**Summer, 1988**
**INSIDERS/OUTSIDERS**

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**Perceptions and Prescriptions**

Explorers, missionaries, educators, folk art revivalists, politicians, health and welfare providers, industries and tourists have all had their own perceptions of what Appalachia was and what should have been done here. This issue will explore the many movements that have come to the region as well as the ideas and feelings of residents new and old.

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In **Now and Then,** contemporary writing and art and visions of the past combine to provide a look at life in Appalachia that you will find nowhere else. And each of our theme issues features aspects of our world that are frequently overlooked. We need your help to continue. If you want to make sure that you will keep on receiving **Now and Then**, send in your subscription—today!

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*Ken Murray*

**Jesse Jones, 80, has spent most of his life working his Scott County, Va., farm. During the last 15 years, he's cut back on his farming and begun devoting more time to the only slightly less physically demanding process of producing fine Appalachian white oak baskets. Jones fells the white oaks he needs, prepares the splits and does all the final weaving. His work has been featured in John Rice Irwin's *Baskets and Basket Makers in Southern Appalachia.***

# Now and Then Editorial Board

With this issue we welcome five new members to our editorial board. They join **Robert J. (Jack) Higgs, Marat Moore** and **Rita Quillen**, our charter members. The editorial board provides us with a generous supply of good ideas, writing and encouragement. Our new advisors are:

- **Bert Allen**, associate professor of psychology at Milligan College, Milligan, Tenn., was the guest editor of our "Appalachian Veterans" issue. A Vietnam veteran himself, he has worked with other Vietnam veterans and with ex-prisoners of war. This year he is working at the Veterans Administration Medical Center at Mountain Home, Tenn., in a project for homeless veterans.
- **Ed Cabbell** directs the John Henry Memorial Foundation in Princeton, W. Va. Through the foundation, he publishes *Black Diamonds* Magazine and puts on the John Henry Folk Festival (this year to be held in Pipestem, W. Va. September 2-4). He teaches Appalachian Studies at Concord College and is working toward his doctoral degree in history at West Virginia University. He was the guest editor for our "Black Appalachians" issue.
- **Pauline Cheek's** *Appalachian Scrapbook* is published by Appalachian Consortium Press. She has studied the history of the rug hooking industry that sustained the economy in the 1930s near her home of Mars Hill, North Carolina, (and has written a story about it that appears on page 35). She was the guest editor for the "Appalachian Childhood" issue.
- **Mary Chiltoskey** was the editor of our "Cherokee" edition. She has been a teacher and librarian in Cherokee, N.C., for more than 40 years. Over the years she has collected folklore, which she has published in books including *Cherokee Cooklore* and *Cherokee Plants and Their Uses*.
- **Fred Waage** teaches English at East Tennessee State University. He is the author of two chapbooks: *Minestrone* and *End of the World: California Stories*. He has served on the publishing staff of the Friends of the Earth, published and edited the literary magazine *Second Growth* and is founding editor of *Now and Then*.


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Earl Yates

**Brenda Wilson, coning department, Leon-Ferenbach, Johnson City, Tenn., 1973.**

# From the Director

This latest issue of *Now and Then* is going to press just as we are in the midst of putting together our budget and action plan for the fifth year of the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services. At times the work has seemed endless, but there have been plenty of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards during the past few years. There is nothing more satisfying, from my point of view, than to work with talented, creative people and to see promising ideas become exciting realities. We have seen the CASS Fellowship Program support the diverse activities of regional artists, scholars and public service advocates, resulting in books, records, films, radio programs, school residencies and other projects directly benefitting our region; we have been able to add new courses and seminars in family practice and anthropology; we have helped our faculty members write grant proposals to support regional writing residencies and a seminar on the cultural and historical links between Scotland and Appalachia. We have sought to help our colleagues grow professionally by sponsoring travel to conferences, by subsidizing the preparation of manuscripts and by encouraging their involvement in consulting projects and service to public schools.

All of this has been like casting bread upon the waters; the Center has grown and flourished because of the support it has given to its faculty members and fellows. Today, however, despite its record of accomplishment, the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services is at a critical point of development. Excellence costs money, and the requests for support we are receiving will soon outstrip our resources unless we can build up a substantial endowment for the CASS Fellowship Program. Preparing a typical book manuscript costs between $600 and $1,000; publishing a major book or phonograph record can cost between $5,000 to $10,000; major films can cost much more.

Publishing a magazine of the quality of *Now and Then* is not an inexpensive proposition, either. If you haven't subscribed yet, I urge you to do so now. Even at the modest cost of $7.50 per year ($10 for institutions and libraries) every subscription helps, and if you can help us even more by giving a gift subscription to a friend or your favorite library, that would be better yet. If you are able to make a larger donation and would like to know more about the work of the CASS Fellowship Program, please call or write me in care of CASS, Box 19180A, ETSU, Johnson City, Tenn. 37614-0002, 615-929-5348. We've come a long way in a short time, but we need your help now more than ever. Stay with us.

—Richard Blaustein


**Now and Then Magazine**

Now and Then has been published since 1984 three times a year by the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services at East Tennessee State University. Subscriptions are $7.50 per year ($10.00 for institutions and libraries).

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Submissions of poetry, fiction, scholarly and personal essays, graphics and photographs concerned with Appalachian life are welcomed if accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope. We will be careful but not responsible for all materials. Address all correspondence to: Editor, **Now and Then**, CASS, Box 19,180A, ETSU, Johnson City, TN 37614-0002.

East Tennessee State University is fully in accord with the belief that educational and employment opportunities should be available to all eligible persons without regard to age, sex, race, religion, national origin or handicap.


# From the Editor

When John Sayles' coal-mining movie, *Matewan*, opened in New York and other large cities in the fall of 1987, I heard wonderful things about it. This independently produced movie brought to life a dramatic moment of West Virginia coal mining history and was a crusading union film.

I was thinking about calling Marat Moore, an ex-coal miner who is now a reporter for the United Mine Workers of America's *Journal*, hoping she might be able to track down the filmmaker for an interview. Before I could get around to it, she called me. She said that she had already seen *Matewan* three times, it was a great film, and she had interviewed John Sayles and wondered if I might like to have that for *Now and Then*. You bet.

John Sayles is not the only artist gaining recognition for focusing on the coal mine wars in West Virginia in the 1920s. Denise Giardina's nationally acclaimed novel *Storming Heaven* covers that same time and place. Giardina, who lives in Eastern Kentucky, also sees the parallels between now and then. She talks about that, and her own activism in an interview with Tim Boudreau on page 9.

It was hard to tear ourselves away from coal mining stories in this issue. Besides the inherent high drama, coal mining brings up endless economic and social implications for Appalachia.

But it is the goal of *Now and Then* to portray the many dimensions of Appalachia, not just the most obvious and dramatic.

This issue is filled with stories and poems about a variety of occupations and lifestyles—from manufacturing soda pop to shining shoes, from plowing behind a horse to peeling onions.

This edition is dedicated to all those who work in Appalachia.

—Pat Arnow

*Earl R. Yates was editor/photographer of Throwster, a newsletter of the Leon-Ferenbach Company, from 1963 to 1977. He is currently employed at Heil-Quaker in Johnson City.*


The views expressed in these pages are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent opinions of East Tennessee State University or of the State Board of Regents.

# From the Archives

By the 1920s Upper East Tennessee had experienced the boom and decline of the timber industry and the introduction of the railroads. Railroad industrial agents and local chambers of commerce were actively trying to entice Northern and foreign industries to locate in the region with promises of abundant natural resources, tax exemptions and cheap non-union labor. In 1913 Carolina, Clinchfield and Ohio Railroad industrial agent F.M. Runnels wrote to S & F Manufacturing, a textile manufacturer in Pennsylvania, that there was "no better help in the world than this mountain type of girl that works ten hours per day for practically one-half the wages that you are forced to pay." In this same letter, Runnels suggested that Johnson City, Tenn., might be the place for the company to escape "the annoyance of strikes." Negotiations by industrial agents and chambers of commerce with outside capital did bring more industries to Appalachian communities, and industrial work and union activities became a part of community life.

A joint effort by the Johnson City and Elizabethton Chambers of Commerce promising tax exemptions and cheap labor helped to persuade a German company to locate two huge rayon plants—American Bemberg and American Glanzstoff Corporations—just outside of Elizabethton, Tenn. The news was greeted with great anticipation. According to the Johnson City *Staff-News*, at opening ceremonies on October 29, 1926, company officials predicted employment of 2,000 persons within the next two months. This promise was especially encouraging to a town whose population, according to United States census figures for 1920, exceeded that figure by only 749. The *Staff-News* reported that at maximum capacity the rayon plants would employ 10,000 individuals.

With the beginning of the Great Depression in the United States and of labor problems at the two plants in 1929, these expectations for Glanzstoff and Bemberg began to wane. The mountain labor proved to be dissatisfied with their low wages. On March 12, 1929, a strike which began at Glanzstoff and spread to Bemberg, eventually resulted in the placement of National Guard troops in Elizabethton.

In an article published by *The Nation* in 1929, visiting journalist Sherwood Anderson recounted his impressions of a secret union meeting he attended. According to Anderson, when the rumor spread that anyone joining the union would be fired, one man responded: "Well, then we will go back to the hills. I lived on birdeye beans before there was any rayon plant and can live on birdeye beans again." Another view of the strike is contained in the Helen Raulston papers which include a transcript of interviews with three former Bemberg employees who worked through the strike. According to Raulston, the local workers were "well satisfied" and the weekly salary of $11.20 was "good wages for people not even used to 20¢ a week." She maintained that the union was responsible for keeping the workers agitated.

While opinions about the strike may differ, it has to be admitted that the two giant rayon plants introduced industrial work and the resulting union activity to Elizabethton and Carter County on a much larger scale than the communities had experienced in previous years.

The Archives of Appalachia holds a number of sources relating to Elizabethton's rayon plants in particular and the industrialization of the region in general. The Helen Raulston Collection consists of two 16mm films (and a duplicate on video-cassette) of the 1929 strike. Two 1982 interviews with three former employees are included as part of the collection. The archives also holds 71 copies of the two rayon plants' publication, *The Watauga Spinnerette* which includes much information on the employees and major events at the factories. Another source concerning the rayon manufacturers is an American Bemberg Research Department report which describes the production of rayon.

In addition the archives has the records of Magnet Mills, a hosiery mill established in Clinton, Tenn., in 1906.

Collections that contain significant amounts of strike-related or union-related materials include records of the International Woodworkers of America, Local 5-313, and the Kingsport Press Strike Collection.

Union activities are further documented in the Bernard H. Cantor Papers (1959-78). The Cantor papers focus on his work as a labor arbitration judge in Johnson City.

The archives holds a number of materials related to coal mining. The Marat Moore Collection consists of photographs, and audiotapes (with original and edited transcripts) resulting from interviews of 35 women coal miners.

The Council on Appalachian Women Records also contains some information on women working in the mines. In the Broadside Television Collection there are a number of video tapes which detail mining and union organizing in the mines.

Photographs of miners can be found in the Appalachian Photographic Collection and in the Kenneth Murray Photographs.

The Carolina, Clinchfield and Ohio Railroads Records contain extensive materials on the location of industries in the region and on the railroad's service to the various industries. In addition, the archives has slide/tape programs on logging and on coal mining in southern Appalachia and scattered issues of the *Southern Lumberman* for 1926-1927.

With the industrialization of southern Appalachia, industrial work and union activities have been and continue to be an integral part of Appalachia's economic and community life.

The archives desires to continue acquiring materials which relate to industry, work and unions. For more information on any of these materials, please contact the Archives of Appalachia, Box 22,450A, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tenn. 37614, phone: (615) 929-4338.

-Norma Thomas and Marie Tedesco

## *Ain't No Pie Jobs*

Another motor down
3 left has 2 inch water
cold water seeps into leaky boots
feet stay cold and ache
way past dinner
and finishing up in the shop

Hands swell from concrete too
can't wear a wedding band
even on weekends off
The grinder
manicures some nails twice
The torch burns eyes bright red
spews hot metal through two shirts

Read the bulletin board at quittin' time
maybe another job up for bid
somebody's got 9 Beagle puppies
school's all day on the 25th
good bass boat for sale
probably Lonnie's
he never got called back

No jobs posted
could be a lot worse

Remember 83?
NO WORK 'TIL FURTHER NOTICE
Thinking on the way home
of hot suppers and warm kids
trying to keep it that way.

—Jenny Galloway Collins

## *Discussion At Age Seven*

My father lifts
his Millers and coughs out
the steel mill.
He's busy
resting.

Iris eyes scan
the pages of a book
he's forgetting.

Cigarette smoke spirals up
through a lamp shade.
I sit and wait for him to say
"I don't remember."

—Georgeann Eskievich Rettberg

Pat Arnow

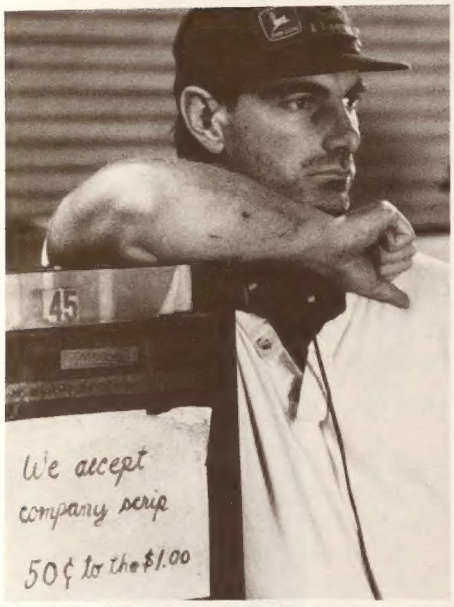
*Jenny Galloway Collins is a native of Letcher County, Ky., and has had poetry published in* ***Mountain Review, Appalachian Heritage*** *and others. She is an occasional contributor to several newspapers in her area. Her poems have appeared in the anthologies* ***Step Around The Mountains, Hidden Poets of America*** *and* ***The Best of Hill and Valley****.*

*Georgeann Eskievich Rettberg teaches kindergarten and a fourth and fifth grade poetry workshop for the Pittsburgh Public Schools. Her work has been published in* ***Panhandler, Sojourner*** *and* ***the Mill Hunk Herald****.*

# Where the Rubber Meets the Road

## John Sayles talks about his coal mining movie *Matewan*

**Marat Moore**




Bob Marshak

**Director John Sayles making the movie *Matewan*.**

*On May 19, 1920, a showdown on the main street of a West Virginia coal town made history in the American labor movement.*

*Eleven armed guards from the infamous Baldwin-Felts detective agency came into the town of Matewan after carrying out forced evictions of pro-union families from houses owned by Stone Mountain Coal Company.*

*Mayor Cabell Testerman and his young chief of police, Sid Hatfield, challenged the evictions. After the guards attempted to arrest the two with bogus warrants, shooting broke out.*

*When the smoke cleared, seven guards, two townspeople and Mayor Testerman were dead. A local jury acquitted Hatfield in the guard murders, but a year later he and a friend, Ed Chambers, were gunned down as they walked up the steps of the McDowell County Courthouse in Welch, W.Va., where they were facing trumped-up charges.*

*The murders of Hatfield and Chambers sent shock waves throughout the coalfields, and triggered the Battle of Blair Mountain in 1921, when 10,000 coal miners marched to do battle against company guards and state militia.*

*With the 1987 production of* ***Matewan****, John Sayles, a novelist and independent filmmaker, realized his goal of nearly a decade, making a movie based upon the Matewan Massacre.*

*Sayles has built a reputation and a loyal following outside Hollywood with his thoughtful, offbeat films including* ***Return of the Secaucus Seven, Lianna, Brother from Another Planet*** *and* ***Baby, It's You.***

**MARAT MOORE: You've had a long interest in Appalachian coal miners, since opening your novel *Union Dues* in the West Virginia coalfields. Why did you return to this subject in *Matewan*?**

**SAYLES:** There is no place in America like Eastern Kentucky and Southern West Virginia. Back in the 1960s, I hitchhiked through the area, and I got a lot of rides from miners who told me about the black lung movement and the struggles within the UMWA. But they all said, 'This is nothing compared to what it used to be. You should talk to my daddy, or my grandaddy. They could tell you some *tales*.'

So when I was writing *Union Dues*, I started reading about the coal wars. And it seemed that in that struggle, you had so many American themes in conflict. There were people who were caught between individualism, which is such an American thing, and the idea of unionism. To have a union, they had to sacrifice their prejudices for something bigger than themselves. And even though the operators were taking total advantage of them, that was very hard for people to do.

And I have always been interested in the theory of America as the melting pot—how that does or doesn't work in this country.

I saw those themes, and plus, just a great movie story. Just the facts are so much like a classic American Western, leading up to the showdown, but with a difference—the violence was collective, and it was political. It wasn't just the sheriff going out there against the mob. It was everybody who said, 'They're not going to take our sheriff from us.' And then it just kind of blew up, like the opening shot of the film. When you see the fuse burning down until it finally explodes. That was the image I had of what happened in Matewan.

Coal mining is, I think, where the rubber meets the road. It is an elemental act. In World War I, America fought with the coal that these guys pulled out of the ground. I mean, how many movies do you see about cowboys? And that era lasted for a very short period of time.

I felt it was time that this sort of attention should be paid. There are a dozen stories you could tell. But it's a harder story to get across, dramatically, to show the rise of a consciousness in a whole group of people than to show a loner against the mob, which is what you usually find in Westerns.

**MM: But the Matewan Massacre was only one chapter in a 30-year struggle. Why did you focus on that incident and not, for example, on the Battle of Blair Mountain which followed a year later?**

**SAYLES:** At that moment in history, Matewan was where everything came to a head. Something had to give somewhere. And that's when it came. Sort of like Cabin Creek earlier. Or Ludlow in Colorado. And it was a time when the union movement was at a crossroads. Matewan was the catalyst to Blair Mountain. It came down to that one little town that was the hot spot. And Blair Mountain was more diffused. You had 10,000 coal miners marching to battle. A lot of lead was flying, and people were scattered out everywhere. Using that many extras was way beyond our budget. That could be the sequel, if we could ever raise the money.

**MM: How difficult was it to finance *Matewan*?**

**SAYLES:** Because of the political nature of the film, it was hard to get anybody interested. About four years ago, the producers actively started trying to raise the money. It was a long haul. They went everywhere. We did send it out to the studios, but we made it very clear that we wanted full control of casting, editing, everything. So we weren't surprised when it came back real quick.

But I knew it wouldn't turn out to be the kind of movie I wanted it to be if it went through the studio system. They might have been interested in it, but it would have gotten changed along the way. The organizer wouldn't have been a Wobbly, and somewhere along the way, he would have said, 'Yeah, I used to be a pretty good shot,' and then he would have picked up a gun, and he would have been there at that shootout at the end instead of being a pacifist.

Courtesy of *UMWA Journal*

Bob Marshak

**Union leader Sid Hatfield, 1894-1921(l.)**
**Actor David Strathairn playing Sid Hatfield (r.)**

After we got it back from the studios, we went to people who had a history of investing in small films. The movie almost came together a couple of times and then fell apart. Once we were on our way to West Virginia to shoot and got a call that the loan didn't go through. So we made *Brother From Another Planet* in between with money I'd made writing screenplays.

*Matewan* cost just under $4 million. The period and the size of it would have cost a studio from $10 to $15 million to make the same movie. But for us, by being very labor-intensive and shooting for seven weeks instead of 15 to 20, we were able to get it done for under four.

**MM: *Matewan* reflects some solid research, especially in the dialect of Mingo County. How did you go about digging up the history?**

**SAYLES:** Since the script sat on the shelf for several years, I had time to deepen my knowledge of the history and just about what conditions people had to contend with. Looking at it, you had to wonder how they were ever able to build a union.

I read a lot more about the pattern of immigration. In 1920, one-quarter of all coal miners in West Virginia were Black. The mines in Alabama were tapping out, so those men needed the work and were often offered jobs that they had no idea were scabbing jobs.

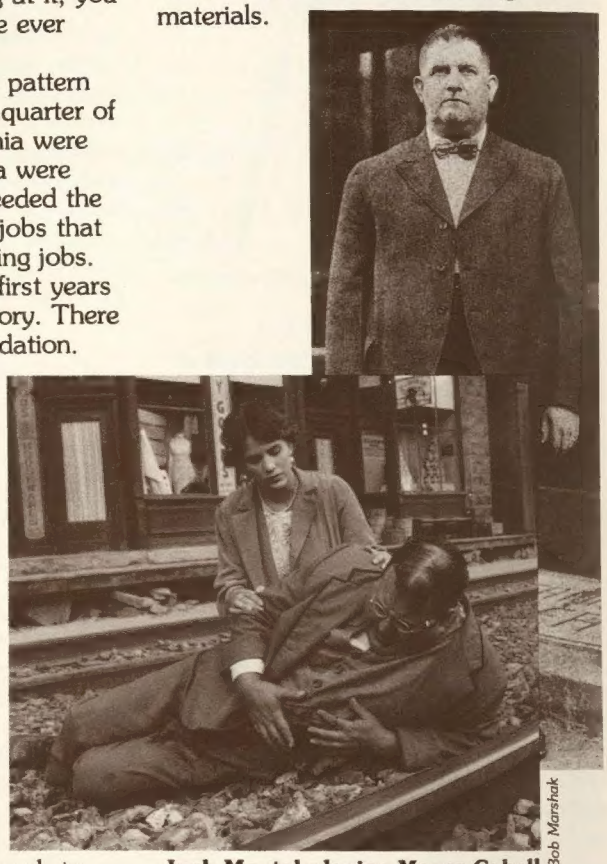
And 1920 was one of the first years for lynching in American history. There must have been a lot of trepidation. West Virginia wasn't Alabama—it wasn't as dangerous to be a Black man there—but the racial tension was there.

They were stuck in a boxcar that was nailed shut, given some bread and water, and then two days later, the door was opened in West Virginia. And when that door opened, not only would miners be throwing things at them because they were breaking the strike, but the company told the Blacks they owed $200 for train fare, and if they didn't work to pay it, they'd be arrested as thieves.

The Italians were a different story. Most of the ones who came to West Virginia were brought right off the boat. They'd never worked in a mine, and very often some guy who didn't speak any Italian would be telling them how to put off a shot and then walk out. So they were carting out dead bodies every day in some of those mines.

Reading the *UMW Journals* from that time, I was impressed by what a strong stand the union took against racism, which was unusual for a union to do. It was an important risk for them to take. The union's message was, 'Don't let the operators divide you, don't fall into this trap.' Racism was one of the strongest barriers the union faced.

We talked to people from that area to do research. One of the nice things that happened is that once we got down there with our various departments, the art department immediately made contacts with local people, with miners, to get the kind of set dressing we needed. We needed a mule and a cart, and old miners are collectors. And when we'd get three hardhats, we'd get three stories to go along with them. So we were collecting stories while we were collecting other materials.



Bob Marshak

**Josh Mostel playing Mayor Cabell Testerman in *Matewan* (l.)**
**Mayor Cabell Testerman (r.)**

**MM: Immigration had a great impact on the region. And the theme of Appalachia as a melting pot—and the struggle to overcome ethnic prejudice—is a major theme of the film.**

**SAYLES:** In West Virginia at that time, the operators hired what they called a 'judicious mixture' of one-third mountain people, one-third Alabama miners, and one-third immigrants from

Greece or Italy or Yugoslavia. It was an incredible melting pot. The operators thought they could put them in separate coal camps with armed guards between them. That was the company solution to what they saw as the cancer of unionism.

**MM: Union sympathizers were not only targeted as Communists, they were deprived of their constitutional rights. That's something that people from outside the coalfields have a hard time believing.**

**SAYLES:** That's right. In those days, foremen were told, 'If you see more than three coal miners sitting together and talking, break them up and tell us what their names are.' There were spies. They knew whom they had grown up with, whom they could trust to spread the word.

People were paranoid because they had a reason to be. You see scenes in the film where the organizer is crawling through the coal camp because the Baldwin-Felts guards were everywhere. Not only would they keep people from coming in the camp, but they patrolled in between the Black sections and the white sections and the Italian sections. You couldn't pass between them without a good reason, and they would demand to know your name. It was like South Africa today, where they keep the workers separated from their families. The company had the miners under lock and key.

**MM: In 1985, close to the time you were making the movie, coal miners in Mingo County were engaged in the most bitter strike since the 1920s against A.T. Massey Coal Co. Were you aware of this history coming back onto the people of the Tug Valley?**

**SAYLES:** Yes, we did hear about that. One of the UMWA members who was in the movie—played a Baldwin agent, in fact—was on selective strike against Massey. And when we were filming, one man told us he'd been down to Mingo County visiting his family, and his 10-year-old nephew was in the backyard with a GI-Joe doll hanging from a noose. When the guy asked the kid what it was, the boy said, 'That's one of them Baldwins, you know, the state troopers.'

It's like Northern Ireland, where the kids feel like they're in a war movie, but the bullets that are flying are real.

**MM: Religion plays an important role in Appalachian culture and has been central in union organizing struggles, both past and present. In the movie, church scenes provide a counterpoint to the conflict, showing fatalistic attitudes played against the ideas of social justice.**

**SAYLES:** I wanted to show the battle went on in the pulpit, with some company preachers arguing against the union, saying it was of Satan, and coal miners in the pulpit preaching for the union as salvation. Like any ideology, you can interpret the Bible to mean very different things.

In West Virginia, if you go to a town of 500 people, you might have 40 churches, all different denominations.

# James Earl Jones in a Coal Mining Role

*Veteran actor James Earl Jones has played many leading roles in film and theater—from his starring role in **Fences** on Broadway to his portrayal of author Alex Haley in **Roots**. Young audiences, however, may know him best as the voice of Darth Vader in **Star Wars**. In **Matewan**, Jones plays "Few Clothes" Johnson, a Black miner once described as "one of the fighten'st union men" in West Virginia.*

Bob Marshak

**Actor James Earl Jones**

**MARAT MOORE: At this stage in your career, you could have your choice of roles. Why did you choose a minor role in a low-budget film about the West Virginia mine wars?**

**JONES:** My agent had read the script and she said, 'Jimmy, this doesn't mean any money or a large part, but here's a project you might be interested in.' She was right. I wanted to work with John Sayles.

**MM: Were you aware of UMWA history before making *Matewan*?**

**JONES:** As a kid in Mississippi, John L. Lewis was my hero. All my friends in grade school thought Franklin D. Roosevelt was God. For me it was Lewis. I listened to him on the radio, so even at that age I knew about the United Mine Workers.

And since Lewis, I think the United Mine Workers has remained an honorable institution. It's a union that hasn't lost sight of its values.

**MM: The events surrounding the Matewan Massacre led to the largest armed confrontation in the United States since the Civil War. Did this history surprise you?**

**JONES:** It was shocking to me to realize that after the Matewan Massacre, during the Battle of Blair Mountain, one of the top heroes of World War I was sent to West Virginia to fly a bombing mission against the miners. That makes you realize how high up in the ranks of the government was the resistance to the miners' cause.

I was also surprised to find out that so many kids near Beckley didn't know that history. I'd be in the mall there and would ask them if they knew about the Matewan Massacre, and most of them had never heard of it. It's not something that is taught in the schools.

**MM: Today, South African miners are engaged in a life-or-death struggle to keep their union alive much like the early organizing battles of the UMWA. Do you think *Matewan* speaks to the current situation?**

**JONES:** I don't know how anybody gets over being spoiled the way management in South Africa has been spoiled for generations. They have had, essentially, slave labor.

Management wanted that in West Virginia, they wanted it in Kentucky, they wanted it in Pennsylvania and Colorado. They wanted all the advantages. And if somebody hadn't made a stand, they could have had slave labor. In a very simple way the film tells that story.

## Sayles...

There were the hardshell and the softshell Baptists. So in the hardshell church, which was more an Old Testament kind of church, the preacher, who I played, is a company man who says that we can't do anything for ourselves here on earth but accept our fate. He was saying, you were meant to serve the coal companies and that's that. But Danny, a softshell Baptist, has a more New Testament interpretation. He believes Jesus meant for us to help each other by joining the United Mine Workers of America.



*Marat Moore has been writing for the* ***UMWA Journal*** *in Washington, D.C., for four years. She was a coal miner in Mingo County, W. Va., and is a native of Johnson City.*

***Matewan*** *never made it to theaters in most of the region. However, it should be available now on videocassette.*

*For a review of John Sayles' book,* ***Thinking in Pictures: The Making of the Movie Matewan****, see page 28.*

*This article appeared in a different form in* ***UMWA Journal****. Used by permission.*

*Marat Moore. Courtesy of the* ***UMWA Journal****.*

**The Tug Valley, the scene of early strife in the coal mines, was also the scene of a bitter 14-month strike against the A.T. Massey Company in the 1980s. Some of the same tactics used in the 1920s were employed to break this strike by 1,100 miners that began after Massey refused to sign the national contract that the United Mine Workers of America had negotiated with the members of the Bituminous Coal Operators Association (BCOA). Massey wanted the union to negotiate contracts with each of its subsidiaries, but miners argued that this would jeopardize their health, safety and retirement benefits. Here, security guards hired by Massey and equipped with riot gear patrol the entrance of a Massey mine, the Sidney Coal Company in Pike County, Ky., February, 1985. This is what picketing union miners encountered every day as strikebreakers crossed the picket lines. A guard shack is under construction in the rear. The *New York Times* reported that "The strike was marred by repeated violence involving both sides."**

*Courtesy of the* ***UMWA Journal****.*

**Strikers tried a new tactic—civil disobedience—in the strike against A.T. Massey in 1985. These miners and their wives held a sitdown protest near Lubata, W.Va., to block the rail shipment of non-union coal. They stopped the train, but they were arrested for their troubles.**
**The *New York Times* reported, "The union finally called off the strike December, 1985, when Massey settled charges of unfair labor practices with the National Labor Relations Board. In the settlement, Massey acknowledged that its subsidiaries were a single company." But, the favorable ruling did not help the miners in other areas. The miners had to go back to work without a contract and the company fired 100 strike activists.**

# Fighting Back

## Denise Giardina talks about *Storming Heaven*

**Tim Boudreau**

Courtesy of the *UMWA Journal*

**Miners and their families were thrown out of company houses and forced to live in "tent colonies" like this one at Lick Creek, Mingo County, W.Va., circa 1920.**

Thousands lined the ridge of Blair Mountain. Sheriff's deputies, coal company mercenaries, American Legion members and college students on summer vacation waited, armed with pistols, some with machine guns and howitzers. Company planes, loaded with crude bombs, circled overhead. U.S. Army troops stood ready.

In the valley, some 10,000 armed union miners prepared to storm Blair Mountain to try to free their neighbors and co-workers held captive by company guards who had overrun their coal camps.

Years of exploitation in the Appalachian coalfields boiled over at the Battle of Blair Mountain, W. Va., during the last two weeks of August, 1921. Dozens of miners died; many more were injured; others lost arms and legs in their futile fight. The battle crippled the fledgling union movement in the Appalachian coalfields and tightened the economic and political stranglehold of outside landowners and coal operators on the coal towns.

But decades later, one of the bloodiest fights in American labor history was largely forgotten, even in West Virginia.

Novelist Denise Giardina thought the story should be told, which she did in her second book published in 1987, *Storming Heaven*.

As a child Giardina said she had "never heard of the battle," even though she grew up in Black Wolf in McDowell County, less than 100 miles from the site.

"I became interested in Appalachian history after college," she said in a recent interview. "When I found out about the strike—with people living in tents, miners trying to overthrow the government—I was shocked. I thought it would be a great story. I couldn't believe someone hadn't written about it before."

Months of research—sifting through newspaper clippings, reading transcripts from Senate hearings on the battle, and interviewing miners familiar with the Battle of Blair Mountain—came together in *Storming Heaven*, a look at the conditions that incited the uprising.

Though her book is fiction it is based on fact. Some of the places and events in her book are composites, but she said she can point to at least one source for each incident. "I didn't make anything up. I didn't want to be accused of exaggerating. I even left out some atrocities because I was afraid readers wouldn't believe them."

Plenty of atrocities were left for the book. She tells of company guards throwing a black man into a furnace and of others attacking a pregnant woman, repeatedly kicking her in the stomach. Another incident, the murder of two union organizers on the steps of a county courthouse, became the basis for John Sayles' movie *Matewan*.

The Battle of Blair Mountain was only the culmination of the miners' struggle, Giardina found in her research. *Storming Heaven* details the daily abuses, the years of humiliations and the grinding poverty suffered by the Appalachian miners and their families. It also looks at the times before outside owners took control of the land and reduced a society of independent farmers and miners to little more than serfs.

Giardina's interest in writing about the coalfields developed gradually. After graduating from West Virginia Wesleyan University in 1973, she did graduate work at Marshall University in Huntington, W. Va. She earned her master's degree from the Episcopal Seminary in Alexandria, Va., in 1979. In 1980, she chose writing over ordination as an Episcopal priest.

"It bothered me that I wasn't writing, so I decided to give it a try...I never dreamed I could make a living off of it," she said. "The only writing I had done before was for the church newsletter."

Giardina completed her first book, *Good King Harry*, which she describes as an anti-war novel based in medieval England, in 1984. The reviews were favorable, but sales were discouraging. Between her first work and *Storming Heaven*, she wrote several guest columns for the *Charleston Gazette*. Payment was a set of coasters. Writing occasional articles for the *Washington Post* was more lucrative, but she had to supplement her income with work as a secretary for various West Virginia Democratic politicians.

"Secretarial work gives me more psychic energy to work on writing," she said. "I can't take a job where they want me to be there five to 10 years, or where they want you to take it home with you. And besides, I can type fast, and that's about my only marketable skill."

She admits that it's tough to survive economically as a writer in the region. "The traditional way is to teach at a college, but I wouldn't want to do that."

## Fighting Back...

With the sale of movie rights for *Storming Heaven* to Columbia Pictures, Giardina could indulge a bit. But she lives simply. Eight miles off the main highway on a road that winds into David, Ky., her neat, single-story bungalow is one in a row of homes that hugs the mountainside. A thin strip of grass separates her house from her neighbors and from a road that carries frequent coal truck traffic from a nearby mine. Inside, an oak table, an Apple computer and a sagging green couch left by the last tenant stand out among the simple furnishings.

Giardina's neighbors know little of her work. She says she is likely better known for helping care for a neighbor's injured dog than for her writings. And for a writer whose latest book has won wide acclaim and was selected as an alternate in two national book clubs, a recent evening at her home was decidedly quiet, interrupted only once by a nephew calling to sell popcorn for his school's fundraiser.

Giardina is comfortable in David. "I liked the idea of living in a coal camp. It appealed to me because I grew up in a town like this."

It also keeps her close to the people she writes for.

"Growing up (in Appalachia) is what made me a writer. Staying here is what keeps me the kind of writer I want to be. I write for people around here, not for academics.

"There is a value system in Appalachia that I try to keep in my writing: a sense of humility, a lack of pretension, a sense of egalitarian values. Also, the culture has a theological base, and I've picked that up."

Still, she wants her writing to appeal beyond Appalachia. While her next book will be based in Appalachia, she is also planning a work about Nazi Germany.

"I'd like to show that Appalachian writers can write about other things besides Appalachia. That's important. People tend to stereotype Appalachia and categorize Appalachian writers, and that's a form of a putdown...I wouldn't mind being pigeonholed as an Appalachian writer if I thought people respected it. People think, 'Oh, that's good, but it's just a subcategory of writing.'

"Sometimes we have to write about other places to show that the Appalachian experience is universal. The issues that people deal with here—love, death, life, family—are the same as elsewhere. And the themes of exploitation that are seen in Appalachia are also universal."

Giardina sees similarities to the Third World in that exploitation.

"We have the same kind of economic situation here as in the Third World," she said. "We have an abundance of minerals. They are taken out by multinational corporations. We don't receive much in economic benefits, and we're left with the problems.

"There is an American ideal of freedom, justice and revolution that has become mainly lip service. It's in places like Appalachia where those values have the best chance of surviving, because the conflict is so clear here," she said.

Tim Boudreau

**Author Denise Giardina**

"The difference between freedom and being exploited is very clear here—and it's very clear where that exploitation is coming from."

Giardina sees a certain irony in the charge that her work portrays Appalachians—West Virginians in particular—unfavorably.

"It's not true," she responded. "I've written about our pride and how outsiders have put us down....The people in the novel are strong, independent, good, interesting people.

"Some criticism comes from people trying to distance themselves from being Appalachians. The prejudice against Appalachians has made some people ashamed of their heritage. Most of American culture is sort of plastic, fake—not something I want Appalachia to aspire to. I'd hate to see Appalachia become a Yuppie haven. But we can't stick our heads in the sand and pretend there are no problems," she added. "To say that the coal industry has done a lot of negative things in West Virginia is not saying anything negative about West Virginia. It's simply standing up and saying they shouldn't be allowed to do this anymore."

Giardina knows firsthand the precariousness of life in a town dependent on coal. She grew up in the tiny coal camp of Black Wolf, where her father kept books for Page Coal and Coke. Her grandfather, an Italian immigrant, had worked underground, as had her uncles.

Page sold out to a larger firm, which closed the mine in 1964. When she was 13, her family moved to Charleston, W. Va., to find work. Black Wolf was abandoned. "There was a traumatic loss of community," she said.

In *Storming Heaven*, Black Wolf became the inspiration for the town of Winco.

"I see coal as a curse....If they had never found a piece of coal in the mountains we'd be better off," she said. "Without it, we would be like New Hampshire or Vermont or North Carolina. We would be clean and prosperous.

"But that's wishful thinking because we do have people here whose livelihoods depend on it."

She urges community control of outside coal interests and calls for "strictly, strictly, strictly regulating (the industry) because it's incredibly destructive."

Giardina draws lessons from the 1921 Battle of Blair Mountain and applies them to contemporary Appalachia.

"There's not much knowledge of our Appalachian heritage," she said. "It's important to know that people fought back. When I found out that people fought back, I thought maybe I should too."

*Tim Boudreau has worked for the* ***Martin Countian*** *in Inez, Ky., and the* ***Bristol Herald-Courier*** *in Bristol, Va. He is now a reporter for the* ***Chillicothe Gazette*** *in Ohio.*

*For a review of* ***Storming Heaven*** *see page 29.*

# LIVES IN COAL

by Mary Alice Basconi

## James Thompson

The buckle on his belt says "WE DIG COAL," and 82-year-old James Graham Thompson means that with all his heart.

The son of a farmer from Finney, Va., he has worked as a butcher, a builder, a cabinetmaker and a miner. It was coal mining he loved best. Three weeks before he was eligible to retire, in 1967, Thompson's glove got caught, and he was yanked into a coal conveyor. The accident ended his 44 years in the mines. "He come within a fraction of being killed," recalls his wife, Lottie.

His arm has been pieced together and his broken ribs have healed, but Thompson was left with aches and pains as well as scars. His breath is sapped by black lung, the miner's respiratory disease caused by inhaling coal dust. His hearing faded out several years ago. None of this bothers Thompson as much as the fact that his injuries forced him off the job. He still pays dues to United Mine Workers of America. And when someone in Local 7604 dies, he contributes to the miners' burial fund.

"My first job as a coal miner was loading coal by hand in 19 and 23," he says. "Harmon Coal Company. You had to buy your own tools, buy your own powder to shoot coal with—buy everything. You'd work three days, 12 hours a day. Then you'd work two days, eight hours a day. Then on payday, the boss would look at how much coal you loaded and you'd probably draw 10 dollars."

Thompson says that $10 for two weeks' work bought more in the 1920s than several hundred dollars buy today. But a miner's earnings then were anything but regular.

"Sometimes you'd load a car (five tons) of coal, they'd give you a dollar for it," he recalls. "If there'd be a rock in it, slate, they'd give you a quarter or 50 cents."

"I tell you, all my jobs in the coal mine—I liked all of 'em," he says. "But my favorite job, the hardest in the coal mine, was loading coal by hand. That was hard, hard labor."

Thompson recalls the clandestine gatherings of miners who were intent on unionizing—and equally intent on evading the dreaded Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency guards hired by coal companies to stamp out union activity. Talking about the union was a firing offense, Thompson recalls. "Back when I first started they had Baldwin-Felts detectives all over the coal fields, shooting men who'd joined the union."

Mary Alice Basconi

**James and Lottie at their home in Pearisburg, Virginia.**

## Lottie Thompson

Lottie Whittaker Christian Thompson has spent much of her life as a miner's wife, living in and around the coal camps of southern West Virginia. At 76 she still puts up canned goods and bakes some of the best rolls and biscuits around.

She honed those baking skills in the coalfields, after her first marriage ended and she had three children to support. In the 1930s a woman in the coalfields had few choices if she needed a job. She had even fewer choices if she had children.

"Whatever come along, that's what I'd do," she says, cheerfully. Mrs. Thompson got her first break at a lumber camp in Brown's Creek in McDowell County, near her hometown of Welch.

"I helped 'em cook and I made a dollar a day. Big money! This woman was the boss, she fed the lumber men. I helped her cook and wash dishes and do all that. She let me keep Evelyn (Lottie's 18-month-old daughter) with me. I made that deal, because she was so little I wasn't going to leave her with anyone. And Daddy kept the boys, Tommy and Billy."

Her next job was in a boarding house for miners at Coalwood, a mining community in McDowell County. "I'd get up in the morning about 5:00 o'clock, and I'd get a dollar a day there, too. I'd cook and wash dishes and pack lunches for the miners. They'd have a day shift and night shift, so you had to know what to put in a man's bucket."

By then she had struck a deal with her brother, who also had young children: he kept her two boys and fed them; she would buy his children clothes and books.

"It worked out real good," she recalls. "That way I could visit them every week . . . I even went to the PTA meetings."

Another job—this one easier and better-paying—came through the recommendation of a coal company nurse. Mrs. Thompson would stay with women after the birth of their babies, doing housework and cooking "so the husband could work." She earned $10 or $12 for two weeks' work. Later she worked in a Coalwood boarding house run by her sister-in-law.

It was at Coalwood that she met James Thompson, who was working as a butcher at that time. After they married in 1943 she quit work to stay home with her family.

Life as a coal miner's wife meant "you just washed, ironed and cleaned house," Mrs. Thompson says. In her first marriage, to a coal miner she describes as "real hot-tempered" and prone to changing jobs often, the family moved 50 times in six years.

"We always lived in coal camps. If you quit working for that company, you moved out of their house. And you bought your furniture from the coal company, bought your clothes from the coal company, anything and

## *The Strikers*

arisen from the smoke
and anxiety
of their paydays
and nights
they bribe their children
with peanuts and candy
to leave;
and leaning against the bar
they stare into mid-space
nodding in low talk;

and limping men
circle the table
grimly shooting nine-ball
with no bets down;

the storm blows open
the double doors,
cigarettes roll
still burning in sawdust;
and outside car horns blare
and men shout that it's time;
hands on hats
they walk into rain

—Joseph Barrett

## *the answer is blowin' in the wind*

Beatty fired Skidmore
for tooting the log train whistle
every time he got stewed.

Well one day it comes up
Beatty's been fired
and Skidmore, when he gets wind,
moseys up with a big shit-eatin' grin
and asks,
"Wal, Beatty, you dirty low
down payment
whose whistle you been
tootin?!"

—Bob Henry Baber

*Joseph Barrett's work has appeared in* ***Southern Humanities Review, Poetry Kanto*** *and* ***Rolling Stone****. He is a native West Virginian who lives in Lexington, Ky.*

*Bob Henry Baber is working on a number of writing projects including new children's books, a collection of his Appalachian poetry and a book on lowku, which, he says is, "your down home haiku." He also works at Appalshop in Whitesburg, Ky.*

## James

"The mines where I worked, they brought the union in over a year before anybody else ever knowed it. We'd slip around, having union meetings back in the woods. Way back in a deep holler. And then, after we got everybody in that wanted to go, we finally got enough men to form a local union."

Thompson worked in three mines in Southwest Virginia from 1923 until 1948. Then in 1948, he took a job with Eastern Gas and Fuel Co. at Kopperston, W.Va.

Koppers Coal Co. had built the 100 homes in Kopperston as its model coal camp in 1938. Mrs. Thompson recalls its amenities: "They built pretty houses and had bathrooms and everything in them. And spaced 'em real pretty." After years spent in older mines that were nearly "worked out," Kopperston's coal seams offered Thompson hope for long-term employment.

At Kopperston he loaded coal, set timbers to support the mine roof, hung sheets of canvas to keep the coal dust down and worked on the conveyor belt that hauled coal out of the mine.

It nearly broke his heart to quit work. "I did want to go back. I'd go back in a minute, if I was able. Yes, I would," he says. "I'd go back today if I was young. Back when I started, you earned about $10 for two weeks' work. And now the lowest wages paid to coal miners—$85 a day. Would you think a long time if someone offered you a job at $85 a day, would you think a long time before you turned it down? I would. Eighty-five dollars is a whole lot of money."

"He used to go out every morning and stand on the sidewalk and watch those men go to work at 5:30 in the morning," Mrs. Thompson recalls. "He'd wave to all his buddies going to work. It was so sad."

It also saddens Thompson that most of his first crewmates at Kopperston are gone. "As the miner would say, they have all kicked the bucket," observes Mrs. Thompson.

"Miners are real close to one another," she says. "They are just a different breed of people from town people or other workers. I guess because they work in the mines, and never know if they're going to come out or not . . . face those explosions and everything. They know it's dangerous for all of them. It's just kind of like they're all kin people. They're all brothers."

## Lottie

everything. And if you didn't have your furniture paid for, they'd just come and haul it back. They wouldn't let you work for another coal company and keep their furniture! They liked you to pay it off, you know. And who, back then, during the Hoover Panic, ever had any money to pay off anything?"

After she married Thompson she lived only briefly in the coal camps. The family moved to Oceana, in Wyoming County, when Thompson took a job at the Kopperston mine.

For Mrs. Thompson life as a miner's wife meant always being ready to face the worst. She faced it several times: twice when Thompson was hurt in the mines and more recently when a mining accident left her son Tom permanently disabled.

"It's one of the most dangerous jobs I know of," she says.

"I'll tell you what the women did back then. They always stayed cleaned up. They always kept the house clean. And those that had men on the night shift always cleaned their living room up of a night, and made sure it was straight, and all the dishes was washed. Because they said, 'You don't know what's going to happen. And he might get killed tonight, or crippled, and neighbors might be coming in.' "

"Back then, they didn't have all those safety rules. You just kind of lived wondering if they'd come back again. And if you saw an ambulance, or a bunch of cars close to the mine, you figured somebody got killed or crippled. And you usually was right. It was just real bad back then. Well, it still is."

*Mary Alice Basconi lives near Johnson City, Tenn., and writes for newspapers and magazines.*

## *Working Mother*

In the circling days

I catch a glimpse

of doubt from my daughter
a question mark

spelled out in Cheerios on the table

How will we survive?

—Rita Quillen

## *Summer of 1908*

Three sisters with faults
no bigger than being born
in a mountain shadow,

hung around all summer
like coats on a hall tree,

waiting for a man
who'd wear them out
with work and childbirth.

—Glenn McKee

## *Fixing Supper*

I am at five p.m. a heathen, Lord,
raging at stations of the house profane:
the frantic stove of spills and chiding pots,
the sink confused and dishes paralyzed,
with children underfoot, the whole house
loud and haywire. No faith here. No charity.
Until this: a pause, a grasp of grace
to serve the chastened fish and gentle rice.

—Suzanne Clark

Carletta Sims

*Rita Quillen teaches at Tri-Cities State Technical Institute at Blountville, Tenn. Her study of Appalachian poetry,* ***Looking for Native Ground*** *is forthcoming from Appalachian Consortium Press.*

*Glenn McKee grew up in Southeast Ohio and lives in Maine.*

*Suzanne Clark homeschools two of her three children. She also writes poetry and is putting the finishing touches on her non-fiction book,* ***Blackboard Blackmail****, to be published by Footstool Publishers this year. Her poems have appeared in* ***Shenandoah, Wellspring****, and other literary magazines, and she is part of a local poetry group.*

*Carletta Sims is a photo major at ETSU.*

**Linda Hunsaker and her son at home in Powell Valley, Wise County, Virginia.**

# ANOTHER SIDE
## of Appalachia
## Southwest Virginia, 1988
### Photos by Kenneth Murray

conceived and coordinated by Carol Moore and Jenay Tate Rockett

**Melissa Ann Palmer's School of Dance, Coeburn, Virginia.**

**Acolyte Ethan Moore at All-Saints Episcopal Church on Virginia Avenue in Norton, Virginia.**

## Another Side...

**Attorney Elizabeth Sturgill at her law office in Norton, Virginia. A native of Norton, she graduated from J.I. Burton High School. Her father, Joe Smiddy, is chancellor emeritus of Clinch Valley College.**

**Nightlife at the Holiday Inn's Shaft Lounge in Norton.**

**Sarah Dotson at Four Seasons, her high-fashion, high-quality, commensurately-priced store in Wise County Plaza. Her store was one the first—if not the first—women's clothing stores to market trendy, progressive clothes and accessories for the woman of means. She has a tremendous following, and her mark can be seen on many women around Norton—many of whom used to shop out of town for the kind of clothes they wanted.**

*Carol Moore directs a sex equity program at the Mountain Empire Community College in Big Stone Gap, Va.*

*Kenneth Murray's latest book* ***Highland Trails*** *is published by the Upper East Tenn. Tourism Council. His two books of photos,* ***Down to Earth*** *and* ***Portrait of Appalachia*** *were published by Appalachian Consortium Press. He has also had pictures in* ***Time, Newsweek*** *and* ***New York Times****.*

*Jenay Tate Rockett is the editor of the* ***Coalfield Progress*** *in Norton, Va.*

Closed eyes
as the instant
overwhelms

Outside
barren trees
rattle
dry leaves rustle
covering browning grass
as the passage of fall
ages the mountains

When spring arrives
there will be
fewer trees
more concrete
asphalt
and red lights
and cops
it never stops

At least Faust
sold his soul
we're giving ours away
day by flatland tourist day.

—Ron Johnson

## *Retirement Living*

is infecundous
monochromatic days

spent in the Sonoran Desert
inside Tucson Estates Senior's Park

your 14' x 52' mobile home
squeezed onto an infinitesimal lot

as you follow Fifi
around your fenced-in plot

collecting hot poodle turds
with a long
handled

scoop

—Sheryl L. Nelms

*Ron Johnson of Spruce Pine, N.C., is an amateur juggler and professional bartender (which he calls the perfect job for a poet). His work has appeared in* ***Dark Starr, The Creative Urge, Possum Holler, Tarot*** *and* ***Bad Haircut Quarterly****.*

*Sheryl Nelms, a widely published poet, lives in Tucson, Ariz., where she says she is "a photographer, a weaver, a painter and an old dirt biker."*

THE STAFF OF LIFE!

# Dr. Enuf is ***Still*** Here

## Voting for Cantankerous Idiosyncracy

John Hart

Since Dr. Enuf was introduced in 1949, it has become a part of the folklore of Upper East Tennessee. When the vitamin-laden soft drink first came out here, it had to be rationed even though it cost five times more than a nickel bottle of Coca-Cola.

The initial outrageous advertising antics got the product off to a fine start. On the eve of Dr. Enuf's arrival, staffers plastered "Dr. Enuf Is Here" bumper stickers on doctors' cars in the hospital parking lot. That same night "Enuf" conspirators hung a banner across Main Street in downtown Johnson City proclaiming "Dr. Enuf Is Here." Another clever strategy was a full-page advertisement on the back page of the *Press Chronicle* made to look like the front page with bold headlines reading: "Dr. Enuf Is Here." Carriers were paid to fold the paper backwards so the back page would look like the front page. And it worked!

In the Appalachian area in the late 40s, undoubtedly the "Doctor," which was marketed as a tonic, helped many local people with vitamin deficiencies. Tri-Cities Beverage has received thousands of letters over the years claiming everything from cured hangnails to improved sex lives. Early promotions for the drink claimed that Dr. Enuf could "cure a nervous run-down condition—a feeling of getting older." Dr. Enuf can no longer be sold as a medicinal tonic, but certainly people still buy it as such. And, even today the bottle claims: "Dr. Enuf is Enough" and "Ask your Doctor about Dr. Enuf."

As locally made soft drinks have vanished from the American scene, sales of the legendary Dr. Enuf have steadily increased over the last five years. Tri-Cities Beverage, the Johnson City company that makes the drink, today boasts of 14 employees and seven trucks that distribute the drink exclusively in Upper East Tennessee.

Charles Gordon, owner and developer of Dr. Enuf, has been a successful local businessman for more than 40 years. Besides being the inventor of Dr. Enuf, he originated the soft drink Mountain Dew, which he later sold to another bottling company. Charles Gordon and his partner, Bill Bridgeforth, were the two characters you may remember being on the original bottles of Mountain Dew. Gordon also owns and operates a local plant, Gordon's Furniture.

The rising popularity of Dr. Enuf in the face of shrinking sales for other independent bottlers nationwide is due to the native independence of the local people. Dr. Enuf drinkers like it not only because it's a quality drink, but because it is a chance to rebel against the corporate monotony of our age. It's a vote for cantankerous idiosyncrasy that flies in the face of high-tech marketing, million-dollar Michael Jackson ads, and the homogenized, sanctified franchise mentality. We've been brainwashed to the point that we no longer support our locally-owned drive-ins but instead rely on some giant franchise. But we recognize Dr. Enuf as a perfect model, a combination of appropriate-size bio-regional sustainable economy; local independence and culture at its best. Let's hope Dr. E. never gets big "enuf" to hire Michael Jackson—but maybe Barney Fife or Otis would be OK.

Dr. Enuf is a tonic to our local spirit. It's like an anchor thrown back in time. The good doctor is a friendly face in a dark slide-top cooler. An old man sitting in front of the little country store sipping the Doctor's elixir is a scene which could only be found in Upper East Tennessee, a familiar and comforting sight.

We wish the good doctor continued success in his practice.

*John Hart, a bird watcher and librarian in Johnson City, has long been interested in exploring the link between folk and pop culture.*

# WORKING IN APPALA

Courtesy of the National Archives, Photo No. 69-RP-242

**Spinner at Pickett Yarn Mill, High Point, N.C. Photographed for the National Research Project, record of the Works Progress Administration, 1936-37 by Lewis Hine.**

Courtesy of the Southern Appalachian Photographic Archives, Mars Hill College.

**Family harvesting potatoes, Western North Carolina, 1940s.**

Courtesy of the Southern Appalachian Photographic Archives, Mars Hill College.

**Man cutting boy's hair, Western North Carolina, 1940s.**

Courtesy of the National Archives, Neg. No. 13119-D

***The first bookmobiles*— Working for the Works Progress Administration, Pack Horse Librarians delivered library books to remote sections by horse and mule. The librarians met once a week at their library to replenish their saddlebags with books. This photo was made January 11, 1938, on Mill Creek, Knott County, Ky.**

# ACHIA NOW AND THEN

Earl R. Yates

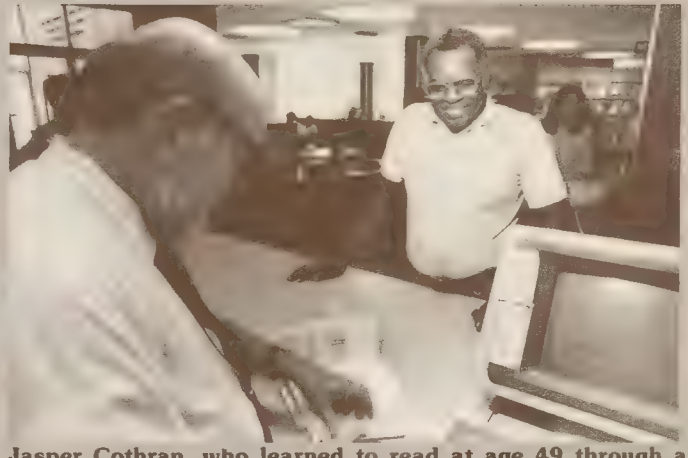
**Ethel Cable worked in the twisting department of Leon-Ferenbach of Johnson City, Tenn., for 31 years. She retired in 1973, saying, "I'll sure miss Leon-Ferenbach."**

Kenneth Murray, from ***Portrait of Appalachia***

**At the Star Barber Shop on State Street in Bristol, Gene Boyd cuts hair while musicians hold an impromptu get together in the back of the store. The barber says, "Every now and then I think about all the musicians I grew up with and played with over the years . . . they all went on to fame and fortune, and I stayed right here cutting hair."**

Alice Anthony (Credit page 33)

**Mary Ruth Livingston of Johnson City pulls out tobacco plants.**



Kenneth Murray

**Jasper Cothran, who learned to read at age 49 through a literacy program, checks out a book at his local library in Spartanburg, S.C.**

# "I Never Did Change Things Here"

**Jane Harris Woodside**

Ivan White believes in work—hard, physical labor, day in and day out. What the Tennessee farmer does not believe in is change. On a fine early spring day, a visitor is likely to find 77-year-old White, having easily climbed the steep slope of the 2,000-foot mountain behind his home, readying horse and plow for planting one of his hayfields. White lives much the same self-reliant life as his ancestors did, farming 80 mountainous acres without the aid of any mechanized implements.

White was the third of seven children born to a farming couple. After completing the fourth grade at a one-room school, he went to work full time on the family farm. "I guess I started following the horse when I was about 10 years old," White recollects. He talks about the long and strenuous days of his childhood philosophically. "That's the way we got it, so. Hard work and plenty to eat and hard work. And being tough enough to stand it."

The community White remembers from his youth was supportive. If neighbors who were sharecropping didn't raise their own wheat for flour and were temporarily unable to pay for a "poke" at the country store, the Whites shared from their supply. In return, the Whites were free to call on neighbors when they needed help.

Community members rarely gathered to socialize unless they had some task at hand—apple peeling or corn shucking, quilting or bean shelling. "When I growed up, people was good to one another. They liked one another. And somebody was sick or somebody got in a tough spot—they could get help.

"We didn't live out of store like people do now. So we made what we eat," White maintains. The family raised potatoes, beans, cabbage and wheat. They kept hogs, cows and horses and made molasses. What they couldn't produce themselves—sugar, coffee, baking soda and salt—they purchased at the country stores which have since vanished from the valley.

The self-sufficient communities of White's youth began to change around World War II. "Do you remember the Roosevelt, the President, he throwed us into war?" asks White, obviously not one of Franklin Roosevelt's biggest fans.

During the war, Appalachian residents left the mountains in large numbers to work in wartime industries. For the first time they became involved in a cash economy and got a taste of the outside world. The introduction of electricity, along with improved transportation and communication, further broke down the isolation of mountain communities. Farm machinery became available. The expanding oil industry provided the fuel to run them. Pesticides and herbicides replaced the old-style organic farming methods. With the encouragement of agricultural extension agents, farmers modernized and mechanized, trading in

Kenneth Murray

## "I Never Did Change Things..."

the horse for the tractor. Old-time farmers had increasing difficulty finding hired hands to help during harvest.

Starting with Franklin Roosevelt, says White, "things began to change. And time speeded up, and it changed the time, and it changed, and it changed everything, you see," he states, using repetition for emphasis. "And back to that time to worse and worse and worse on up 'til now. And so, times speeded up faster and faster.

"Every president changed. Things got different, more different, more different. Things that you didn't understand, and programs come up that you didn't, you know, hear tell of or didn't know anything about. And so you didn't know the meaning of it, and a fellow like me was out, you see, on the outside of it. Have to get somebody else that understood it or had the education to explain these words to you that I wouldn't know."

In the midst of all this social, economic and cultural change, White has done his best to stand fast. "I never did change things here," he asserts. He did not purchase farm machinery because "hillside farming and all didn't suit a tractor. But you could take a pair of mules or a pair of horses and go up on these hillsides."

White also has some less pragmatic reasons for sticking to the old ways. "I do it 'cause I was raised that way, and I liked it, and I never did care too much about a tractor." What he does care about are horses. "Good horses. And good mules. I like that better than anything that I have to work with on the farm. I guess that's the reason why I like farming as well as I do. 'Cause I like to work this stock. I mean I train them, and they know what I say. And they mind just like a kid would mind you. And I keep stock that's got sense."

The farmer has resented the increasing intrusion of the government into agricultural matters, especially "Set Aside" programs designed to increase farm prices by letting fields lay fallow, thereby decreasing supply. He has refused to participate in such programs. "I just didn't like the idea of somebody telling me what to do with something that I owned. And if I wanted to let it lay out, it just laid out. So I didn't draw no check on it or anything. And if I had the notion to farm it, why all right."

In 1951, White married. He and his wife, Bertha, live in the grey-shingled house that his father built. The Whites are connected to the outside world by their telephone and radio. With marriage came more responsibility than he'd "ever had before or ever thought about."

Other than his marriage, however, White's life follows much the same rhythms as those of his childhood. During the growing season, he plows, sows and reaps with his horse-drawn machinery. He is also proficient at various crafts—blacksmithing, veterinary medicine, and broom making. White has increased his dependency on stores over the years, and he and his wife hire a neighbor's car once a month and get staples such as cornmeal and flour at a local supermarket.

Working the farm the old way presents some challenges White's ancestors didn't have to face. Farmers who specialized in some particular craft and provided their neighbors with implements are gone. Many of the parts White requires to do his work are not only scarce, but even worse, are now considered antiques and sell at exorbitant prices. It is not uncommon for White on his rides into town to pass by the plow points that are essential to his livelihood painted and placed as ornaments by the side of mailboxes. White copes by making what repairs he can, tracking down old implements that mechanized farmers have piled in outbuildings or occasionally finding parts in a nearby hardware store.

Although White has done his best to maintain his traditional culture, the rural community that supported that way of life has crumbled. The old families have scattered. Although some farming continues in the valley, most people travel to nearby cities and towns to work. Some retirees have moved into the valley. Younger people move in, then move back out after a brief stay.

The breakup of the old community with its cooperative ethos has forced White to be even more self-reliant than his father. "You don't go too far in farming any more. Just what you can do yourself," he says. "Somebody that's farming like you, well, they busy when you busy, you see? And them that ain't busy, you better off without them because they ain't no count when you get them. They're going to stand around and count the hours and count their money."

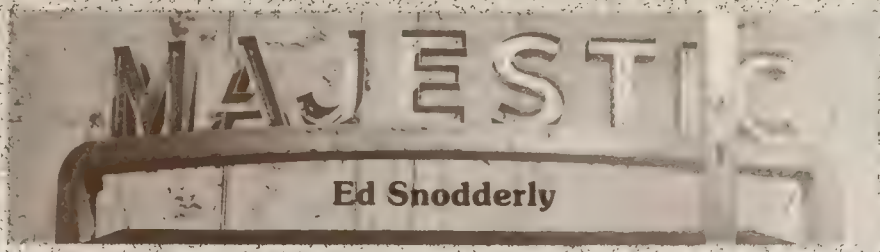
White feels alone in more profound ways. In contrast to the old days, people now "want nothing to do with you. Me and mine and the hell with you. That's the way they live around here. You feel like if something happened, you got no friends around. Kind of cold, yeah."

White plans to continue rising early, working long days in the field, tending to his animals, and practicing his crafts as long as he is able. For Ivan White, life and hard work are inextricably linked.

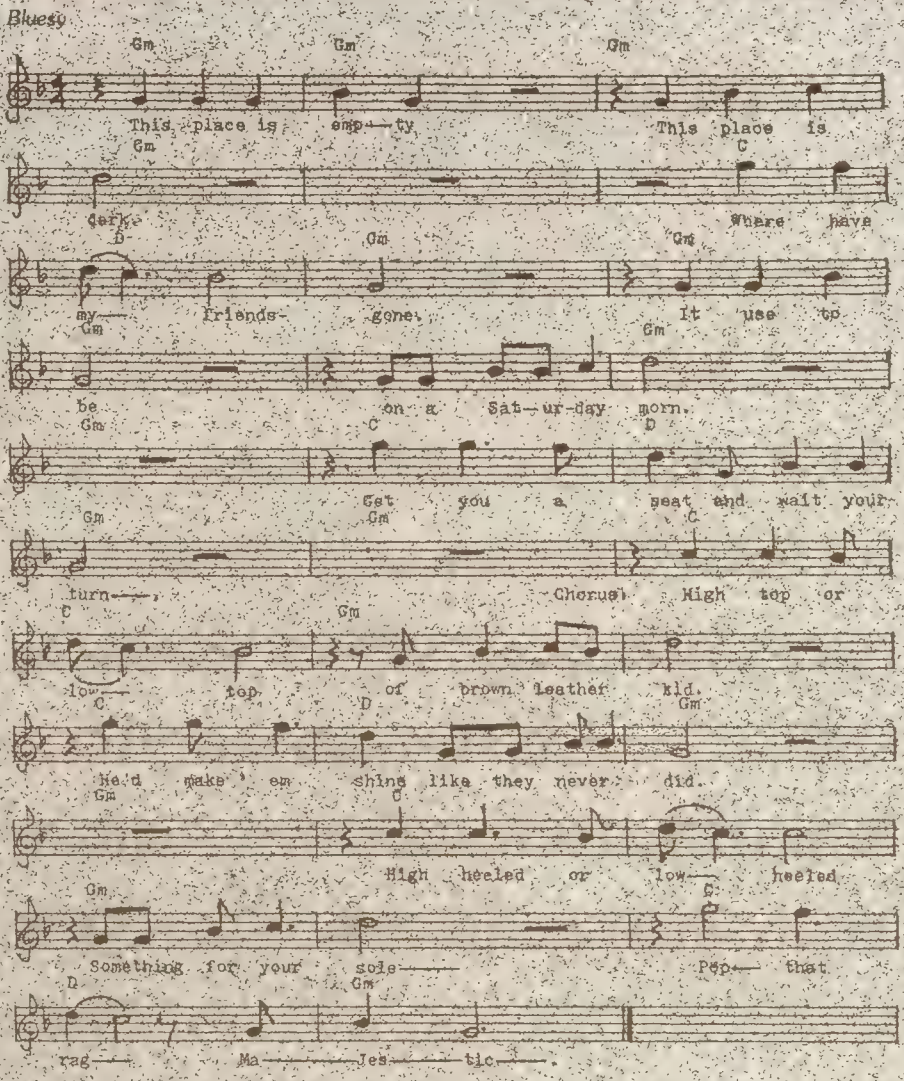
Kenneth Murray

*Ivan White is a pseudonym designed to protect the farmer's privacy so that visitors interested in old-time farming methods don't prevent him from plowing his fields and raising his crops.*

*Jane Woodside is not a pseudonym. She is a folklorist and Research Associate at the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services.*




## Ed Snodderly


Bluesy
This place is emp—ty This place is dark,
Where have my friends gone,
It use to be on a Sat—ur—day morn.
Get you a seat and wait your turn—,
Chorus: High top or low—
top of brown leather kid.
He'd make 'em shine like they never did.
High heeled or low—heeled
Something for your sole— Pop— that rag—
Ma———jes———tic—.

Now Lee is my friend
He's a shoe shine prince
He could shine a hundred shoes in a day
With a smile whose next
For the Majestic chair
Two steps up and you'd be sitting there.

CHORUS: High top or low top
Of brown leather kid
He'd make 'em shine like they never did
High heeled or low heeled
Something for your sole
Pop that rag, majestic.

This place is empty
This place is dark
Where have my friends gone,
It use to be
On a Saturday morn.
Get you a seat and wait your turn.

CHORUS

It was the other day
I seen him on the street
He said; why don't you come and visit me
Oh yes, yes, yes
The lords been kind
I've been sick but now I'm fine.

CHORUS

*Ed Snodderly, 1988. Drivin Round Music, BMI. To be released on a forthcoming album,* ***Imperial Hotel.***

# The Shine Man

I wrote this song about a friend of mine, Lee Allen. He was the shine man at the Majestic Barber Shop, in downtown Johnson City, Tenn.

In writing this music section for *Now and Then*, I thought it would be interesting to talk with Lee Allen—to give more insight on him and the place where this song comes from. I found Lee more than happy to talk about his life and the art of shining shoes.

Lee Allen shined shoes at the Majestic for 15 years. Before that, Lee worked various other jobs: bottle man, janitor, cafe cook, dishwasher, preacher, cafe manager, and a trucker for the Clinchfield railroad. His first job was shining shoes at the age of 15 in 1925.

Ed: How did you learn to shine shoes?

Lee: I learned watching other boys shine.

Ed: What did a shine cost then?

Lee: Well, down there then, in Greenville, South Carolina, a shine—was 10 cents. I worked for a Mr. Auston. He was running the barber shop and he took me in.

Ed: When you were 15?

Lee: When I was 15—uhhmn.

Ed: When did you start shining at the Majestic?

Lee: Let's see—I retired in '67 from the railroad. I started right after that.

Ed: Could you make pretty good money then?

Lee: I made a right smart, when I first started—one day down there, I made $44.75—in one day.

Ed: How many shoes was that?

Lee: Oh, boy, and I was so tired that day—when I got home it didn't take much for me to go to sleep. That was Christmas time—the rest of the time I did real good, but it started slacking off, slacking off 'til it got down to where I'd make—I'd stay there a long time and just make two or three shines a day.

Law, law I've shined shoes. Where I was shining—where I first started shining shoes, there was a shine stand as long as that couch or longer. There was five of us boys. I was on this end—these other boys, they were more experienced than I was—see I just watch them and learn how. But boys, it was a busy place, it was busy all the time. Back in the 30s the shine business was extra-good.

Ed: All kinds of customers.

Lee: Oh yeah, yeah—oh yeah, this was on Main Street in Greenville, South Carolina.

Ed: Do you miss it?

Lee: I just miss doing some work. I'd be satisfied doing anything if I was able to.

Ed Snodderly

**Lee Allen by the Majestic Barber Shop, Johnson City, Tenn.**

Ed: Lee, what's a spit shine?

Lee: Well, a spit shine is—you wash the shoes off, wash them off good and put about three coats—rub them three times and every time you rub them put extra polish on them. Then you put a little water and shine real hard—and that leather will begin to shine. Then you dab a little more polish and rub them again, back through the back, and you will get a shine that will stick, I mean it will stick a long time.

*Ed Snodderly is a musician, songwriter and one of the proprietors of Johnson City's renowned live music club, The Down Home.*

## *Our Minister's Other Heaven*

At times he abandoned
regimented glories and flew
with us to other planets
tended by angels in space helmets.
Our guilty pews softened and souls
long hardened to threats of eternal fire
reconsidered a heaven offered
as interplanetary adventure, an everlasting
Disneyland without the lines.
We stayed late, the organ
blasting like a rocket ship
through the sublunary mill town,
gray and silent as a barren planet.

—Randy W. Oakes

# Review

## *Harriette Simpson Arnow, 1908-1986*

**a film by Herb E. Smith**
**16mm. or videocassette,**
**36 minutes, 1988**
**Appalshop Films**

Robert J. Higgs

Much of the fiction of Appalachia deals with the coming and going of individuals and families into and out of the region. *The Great Meadow* by Elizabeth Madox Roberts may be regarded as the representative novel of settlement of the Kentucky country. It is a masterpiece, and so is Harriette Simpson Arnow's *The Dollmaker*, the definitive novel of the great exodus from Appalachia to the northern cities prior to and during World War II. If she wrote nothing else, Arnow would still be a significant American writer. Hence, anything she has to say about fiction is worthy of attention, and in the Appalshop film, *Harriette Simpson Arnow, 1908-1986*, she has plenty to say. Directed by Herb E. Smith, the film, like the person it honors, is unaffected, straightforward and honest. Arnow herself does most of the talking, which is as it should be, and the main topic is what it should be—writing.

Harriette Arnow would probably not object if we said that the topic was rewriting since this is what she stresses heavily in her remarks on her craft. These will be sweet words to English teachers and they should be regarded as wise words for aspiring young writers—and older ones too. John O'Hara said that he wrote at a single sitting at the typewriter, stories which were ready to be sent to his editor. This was not the way of Harriette Arnow. She was more like Donald Davidson who said that there is no such thing as good writing, only good rewriting, or Dylan Thomas who acknowledged that he worked "not by writing but rewriting. Almost any poem is fifty to a hundred revisions—and that's after it's well along."

Harriette Arnow echoes the sentiments of the rewriters. Seen writing in one of her notebooks and later at the mechanical typewriter, which she much preferred over her husband's electric with its irritating hum, she speaks not about completion of works but always of "beginnings." From the embryonic notebooks which she stored in a chickenhouse, and which were apparently bank accounts of ideas, as Hawthorne regarded his, she went on to a worksheet, another beginning, and then on to the first draft, still another beginning. Always she was reshaping and polishing. As she describes the process, her gravelly voice slow, deliberate and full of

Robert Arnow

**Harriette and Harold Arnow take a break from ripping out the front porch of their farmhouse in Keno, Kentucky, 1941.**

## *Letter from a Writer*

*Shortly after publication of Harriette Arnow's* ***Dollmaker*** *in 1954, she wrote this letter to a woman from her hometown of Burnside, Ky. In it she ruminates on an often-discussed point in her book—the meaning of the ending.*

Dear Vivian,

How times does fly. It seems such a little while since you were a little girl—you used, I think, to roll the baby buggy back during the war when I lived in Burnside for a little while, and you lived on the street across from the Christian Church, and it doesn't seem so awfully long ago that I knew your aunts at school—all I believe older than your father. We all used to jump rope a lot at noon, and they could jump me down, though I believe they were younger than I. We were in Burnside for a while last year, but didn't get to see any one except the local doctor—Tom got sick, and we were out at Mama's.

Nice to know you have been reading *The Dollmaker*, and it is no surprise to hear of two people who disagree on why Gertie split her block of wood. Critics and those who wrote showed a marked division; the symbolists as a rule saw Gertie as a failure, giving up the only fine thing remaining to her in order to live, or in other words complete adjustment to the alley life that on the surface seemed all shoddy ugliness. The humanists—ministers, teachers, social workers and such quite often saw her as a success—a woman come of age and with strength enough to face the world without a symbol. It is true that Gertie is a fictional character, so completely fictional that no one has come forward to say, 'I saw a Gertie.' Still, she is real to me, more so I am certain, than many people I have met. Hence, I cannot say of her any more than I can say of actual people, or even of myself, why she did this or that. Do we really know? Why did I write about her in the first place; I never thought she would bring either fame or money, and neither did much of anybody else, save a handful of people at Macmillan and my husband who liked her though he didn't think anybody else would.

I know the behavioral sciences and child psychology put much stress on motivation, but these sciences are only in their infancy and constantly changing; the psychology I studied at the University of Louisville is now pretty well outdated, for as we learn more of human kind we learn mostly what a marvelously complex thing is any member of the human race, even a simple woman such as Gertie. Two children can be born into the same family, have to all outward

## Arnow...

knowing, and her face radiating sincerity and weathered living, she suggests something more than writer, something like the *vates*, the writer-prophet. We can, I'm sure, read about her ideas of writing somewhere, but hearing them from her personally in her working milieu is something special. Like Henry David Thoreau, whom I know she admired, she appears fussy on occasion, even cranky, always a little out of tune with the world around her, but always observant, always cultivating the singular voice and vision as the serious artist must.

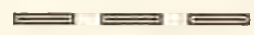
Appropriately, Smith catches the subject at turning points in her life, "beginnings," Arnow might say. Her first job as a teacher in a one-room school in Pulaski County was a beginning. The daughter of two teachers, she tried teaching in Louisville, which didn't work out since the principal "spied on" her and the children knew "mean tricks." From Louisville she went to Cincinnati where she worked as a waitress and devoted herself to writing, publishing her first story with *Southern Review*, a beginning that took her on a distinguished career in her true calling.

There were other beginnings, the publication of her first novel, *Mountain Path* in 1936, an effort with her new husband, newspaperman Harold Arnow, to live off a 150-acre farm on the South Fork of the Cumberland River—a "terrible disease" she calls the experiment in characteristic low-keyed humor, the subsequent move to Detroit, writing *The Dollmaker*, and raising a family.

Her views on the setting of her novels and her ideas about living in town and country are engaging and revealing. She was strangely attached to both and seemed to alternate between them throughout her life. She dearly loved nature and its manifold beauty, which she could describe in crystal prose, but also the conveniences of the city. In Detroit, she says, "it was so much better to get water by turning a faucet than by going down to that spring and wondering if you would encounter another snake." Obviously, this is not the voice of Gertie Nevels, the hardy heroine of *Dollmaker*. What is thus underscored in the contrast is the creative imagination of the artist which in her life was not sufficiently recognized, too many people assuming that *Dollmaker* was largely autobiographical.

One of the biggest problems for Harriette Arnow was finding the time to think and to write and rewrite. What comes through powerfully is the burden on the truly dedicated writer with a family. The old cliche, "A man works from sun to sun/but a woman's work is never done," held true for her as a woman and a writer. It was essential not to cook and write at once, she said in typical folksy fashion, for if you do, you ruin both the cooking and the writing. How so much energy emanated from so small a frame was amazing. Simple organization of time turns out to be part of the secret. She wrote in the quiet hours of the early morning, after feeding her baby around 3:30 a.m. and before Harold arose around 6:00 or 7:00 a.m.

The devotion of Harriette Arnow to her craft as pictured is inspirational. "I've given about everything to writing," she told me after one of her lectures here. That is not quite true as the film shows. She gave much to her family and was always willing to share her insight with those wanting to grow and learn. In *Harriette Simpson Arnow, 1908-1986*, she is still sharing her remarkable beginnings.



*Robert J. Higgs co-edited (with Ambrose Manning)* ***Voices From the Hills****, an anthology of Appalachian literature. He teaches English at ETSU.*

## *Letter...*

appearances the same environment and become people who differ in most aspects of their lives.

Thus, to give any black and white answer as to exactly why Gertie split her wood seems an untruthful thing to do; books and their characters exist only to their readers, and the reader has the right to interpret any tale as he sees fit. However, I always felt that Gertie split her wood because she really didn't need it any more; it was not an act of despair (my husband many years ago in Chicago knew an artist who could not sell his paintings and in a fit of anger stacked them in a pile and burned them all; my feelings on hearing the story was the man burned his paintings, not because he had, it was during the depression, given time and money for materials that yielded him nothing, but because he realized his paintings were not and had never been much good.) I don't think Gertie had any illusions about her artistic ability; after all she had displayed something more than talent in carving the outlines of the figure and the hands. True, she needed the wood for dolls, but the family was not starving, not yet; she might have got more laundry work or have tried for heavy cleaning, but instead in order to give the family a bit more security, she chose, after deliberation, to sacrifice the figure. It hurt, and it was a sacrifice in a sense made for all the things she hated such as the Icy Heart. You can stop there, and bewail her fate as many have done, and hate modern civilization, and think of Gertie as its victim, losing home in the country, children, and her last thing, the block of wood, all to the monster. I prefer, however, to go a step further; her life in the country under her mother had never been too happy; she had learned that the alley was indeed a big place; bitterly she had realized that some at school would have understood Reuben, and taken Cassie as Cassie was without trying to change her; she had learned or rather felt enough of human compassion and understanding after reaching the city, that she could split the block of wood, knowing the things she had wanted in the face were about her in the world. However, if you don't agree with all this, don't feel badly; many saw matters in an entirely different light.

Sincerely,

Harriette Simpson Arnow

*© Estate of Harriette Simpson Arnow 1988*

# Review

## *Black Coal Miners in America*

**by Ronald L. Lewis**
**The University Press of Kentucky**
**Lexington, Kentucky 1985**
**$25.55 (hardcover)**

G.E. Neasman and Larry Mayes

Courtesy of the National Archives. Photo No. MS1515L

**Miner and his family shop at subsidiary company store in McDowell County, West Virginia, August, 1946. Photo by Russell Lee**

The full story of the Black peoples' gifts to America is yet to be told. Many distinguished Black writers, including the scholarly and gifted W.E.B. DuBois, wrote extensively during the first half of the century about the role of Blacks in developing America; however, Black achievements were often excluded from history books written largely by white historians. No doubt most people in America today, white as well as Black, have little knowledge of the significant role Blacks played in building this country. Dr. Ronald L. Lewis has helped correct this problem by providing an account of a slice of Black history.

Dr. Lewis provides an insightful analysis of the role of the Black labor force in the American coal industry. The author examines the distinctive patterns of race relations that prevailed in the mines from 1780 to 1980. In the process, Lewis weaves a detailed historical account of the importance of Black labor in development of America's coal industry.

The history of Black miners in America reaches back to slavery and existed in both South and North. As the coal industry expanded in the South during the antebellum period, slaves were deployed in the mines as in other Southern industries. Although slavery was abolished with the Emancipation Proclamation, vestiges of forced Black labor continued in the coal industry. The system utilized tens of thousands of Black convicts in the form of convict leasing. The coal operators exploited the Black miners in order to guarantee their profits.

The pattern of race relations in the Northern coalfields was different from those in the South. Wages were higher in the North because of the strength of the miners' labor union, which was traditionally white. The Black miners were utilized to a large extent as scabs during labor conflicts. The established white miners used all means at their disposal in order to protect their jobs and to prevent Blacks from entering their communities.

According to the author, Central Appalachia attracted more Blacks than any region in the nation because Blacks found equal pay for equal work throughout the area coalfields. Here operators maintained control over their workers through a policy of "judicious mixture," enabling the operators to conquer labor by offering equal opportunity to all miners while, concomitantly, instituting repression against all those, regardless of race, who did not accept complete subservience to management.

Lewis concludes his analysis of the Black coal miners' experience with an outline of the forces which nearly eradicated Blacks from the coal industry. The author posits that market and technological forces combined to reduce the mine labor force. As the demand for labor began to decline, discrimination against Blacks resulted in their being disproportionately affected by the attempt to modernize the mine industry. As operators replaced miners with machines, Blacks were nearly eliminated from the mine labor force.

Ronald L. Lewis' *Black Coal Miners in America* is a welcome addition to the sparse literature that documents the role of Blacks in fashioning the face of American industry. His chronicle of Black miners adds another chapter to the history of Black Americans. To those who want to know more about Black contributions to America, this book offers a glimpse through the chronicle of one thread of Black experience. The book is informative and good reading.

*G.E. Neasman is Director of Human Resources at East Tennessee State University. A native of Florida, he has worked in Mississippi state government.*

*Larry Mayes is a planner/evaluator with the Office of Human Resources at ETSU.*

# Review

## *Convicts, Coal, and the Banner Mine Tragedy*

**by Robert David Ward and William Warren Rogers**
**The University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa and London, 1987**

Jim Odom

Because of its subject matter, *Convicts, Coal, and the Banner Mine Tragedy* is a troubling work. It concerns a mining disaster in 1911 near Birmingham, Ala., which killed 129 workers, most of whom were unskilled Black convicts.

Since the creation of its prison system in the early 1840s, Alabama had attempted to run its penal institution for profit; by the late 1840s, the state had hit upon the expedient of leasing the operation of the prison to the highest bidder who then worked the convicts at the state's facility in various enterprises, sometimes agriculture, sometimes manufacturing.

After the Civil War, various state governments, including Alabama's, modified their penal codes with what the authors describe as "those provisions of social restraint and economic discipline remembered as the Black Codes." To the degree that they regulated Black economic and social activity in a manner satisfactory to whites who resented bitterly the abolition of slavery, the Black Codes appeared to many people outside the South as a not-so-well-concealed effort to reinstitute slavery in all but name.

In the post-Reconstruction period, Bourbon Democratic governors not only leased the use of convicts to bring revenue to the state but generally leased the convicts for work outside the penitentiary, particularly in mining, timber or textile industries.

Several questions naturally arise concerning the reasons local and state governments used the convict leasing system. Did governments at various levels use this system primarily to save money that they would otherwise spend managing felons and misdemeanants? Did they use their penal codes to insure a source of revenue in order to keep other taxes low? Did they collude with industrial or mining interests to apply the penal codes to meet contract obligations for the supply of a reliable and cheap source of labor? All of these questions, Ward and Rogers make clear, could most often have been answered with a strong affirmative.

If two conditions had been met, an affirmative response to the first of these questions would not, in itself, indicate a morally reprehensible policy. These conditions would have been, of course, a reasonable and just penal code, fairly applied, and work places which were not life-threatening or damaging to the convicts' health.

Despite periodic scandals and calls for changes in a system that subjected hapless Blacks to direct exploitation in work places that contemporary medical reports indicated to be "the vilest scenes of filth, disease and cruelty," the system endured because it was profitable and because it continued to function as a means of social control in a racist society.

The large number of deaths in the dramatic Banner Mine explosion raised anew questions in the press and legislative halls about the convict lease system. Much of Ward and Rogers' thoroughly researched monograph deals with mining company attempts to allay fears on the issue of safety in the mines, on mining inspections and cover-ups, on parliamentary maneuvering and lobbying preparatory to new mining regulations and commissions and various positions on mine safety taken by area newspapers. Since the convict labor system itself was still linked to matters of social control of Blacks, the political establishment in 1911 was not prepared to react to the disaster at the Banner Mine by destroying or even significantly modifying the convict labor system; the legislature did, however, adopt a new mine safety code.

The passage of the new code in 1911 did not mean, of course, that working in coal mines thereafter was reasonably safe. Infrequent mining inspections, the deliberate overlooking of infractions, the outright venality on the part of safety inspectors, and the disinclination of owners to spend money on safety were some of the reasons the legislation was more symbolic than effective.

One of the disappointments of the Ward and Rogers book is that very little information is given about the victims of the disaster. These generally careful historians indicate by way of disclaimer in the introduction that their work is *not* intended to be a history of the convict leasing system. They specifically state that "the book is about the men who worked involuntarily in the Banner Coal Mine." To be blunt, the book is *not* about these men, except incidentally. Rather, it is primarily about the pathetic political maneuverings following a mining accident that claimed the lives of these involuntary miners. No doubt these scholars are correct in their assessment that "the full story of the convicts cannot be told because biographical information on them is almost nonexistent." Since that is apparently the case, one wonders why they promised what they could not deliver.

This valuable piece of research would have been strengthened had Ward and Rogers achieved throughout the work the very clear, direct and eloquent prose style with which they

Jim Odom admits to having strong feelings about Alabama coal mines for personal reasons:

*Ward and Rogers indicate that coal miners routinely claimed that the mines in the Warrior Field were very gaseous; from family experience I know that the mines in the large coal field northwest of Birmingham were not only unusually gaseous but also that the mining legislation of 1911 proved woefully inadequate to the task of insuring safety for the miners. My own grandfather, as superintendent for a mine in this same area, led a party into the Sayreton #2 Mine in 1943 to rescue miners after an explosion; a second explosion killed him and other members of the rescue party. The mine owners (Republic Steel) claimed in 1943 what the Pratt Company did in the Banner Mine accident in 1911, that a miner's carelessness had caused that accident. Whether that was the case in 1943 or in 1911 is open to question; shortly before the explosion that cost him his life, my grandfather had written to his son in military service in Iceland that he was very concerned about safety in the mines because of gas; he told other members of the family at the same time that his requests for an improved ventilation system were ignored by the owners.*

# Review

concluded their study. Calling the system of convict leasing "the Black Code of the New South" which "served government and industry to the great reward of both," they conclude that the system, "in the name of dealing with criminals, created and fostered the use of forced labor," and that "it functioned fully as much—and sometimes more—to supply the requisite cheap labor to favored interests as it did to handle criminals."

*Jim Odom, a native of Birmingham, Ala., teaches history at ETSU.*

## *Thinking In Pictures: The Making of the Film* Matewan

**by John Sayles**
**Houghton Mifflin,**
**Boston, Massachusetts 1987**
**$9.95 (paperback)**

Richard Blaustein

*Thinking In Pictures* is an instructive analysis by a creative artist of the process of conceptualizing and realizing a major film project.

*Matewan*, which opened in 1987 and received enthusiastic reviews, is a romantic yet emotionally authentic interpretation of an actual Appalachian coalfield gun battle that occurred in 1920. Inspired by the vivid recollections of elderly West Virginia miners, writer/director John Sayles used the oral history of the Matewan Massacre as his point of departure in exploring broader themes of tension and conflict in American society:

> *All the elements and principles involved seemed basic to the idea of what America has become and what it should be. Individualism versus collectivism, the personal and political legacy of racism, the immigrant dream and the reality which greeted it, monopoly capitalism at its most extreme versus American populism at its most violent, plus a lawman with two guns strapped on walking to the center of town to face a bunch of armed enforcers—what more could you ask for in a story?*

Strongly evocative of Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, the script of *Matewan*, which is printed in the book, encapsulates what Sayles perceives as the essence of the ongoing American dilemma. Its chief protagonists are a pacifist ex-Wobbly labor organizer, seemingly an amalgamation of Tom Joad's friend Preacher Casey, Harry Sims, Woody Guthrie and Joe Hill, who dies in an idealistic attempt to unite the miners of Matewan without resorting to violence, and Danny, a young miner and budding preacher who somehow survives the massacre and goes on to devote himself to making the union a reality. *Matewan* is not just history. It is also an attempt to personalize ideology and philosophy:

> *If all the movie is about is who got shot and who didn't, the history ends there—it doesn't inform anything we do today. But people still go underground to mine coal, people with power still pit races and ethnic groups against each other to keep them from taking control of their own lives, religion is still used for oppression as often as liberation. The last shot in the movie is not the dead Baldwins on the street but Danny walking back into the mine, his voice as an old man telling us how he went on to work for the things Joe Kenehan stood for . . . we have seen only a piece of an ongoing battle.*

The film *Matewan* operates on many levels. Reading *Thinking In Pictures* makes one realize how much we take for granted when viewing a film, how easy it is to pick up on flaws and imperfections in the work of others and how hard it actually is to bring together all of the elements which draw us into a work of narrative art.

A novelist turned filmmaker, Sayles is acutely aware of the possibilities and limitations of various narrative media:

> *Fiction relies more on the imagination of the reader, while movies often seem to be imagination made solid. We do some of our understanding straight from the gut, and if we can be made to feel the damp and cold of the mine shaft, feel the weight of the pick, breathe the dust-thick air, we're going to have more of a handle on a coal miner and his feelings than we could get just from reading and thinking. Thinking in pictures is a way to inhabit the bodies of characters as well as their minds. Trying to bring those pictures, those feelings to other people, is a lot of what movie-making is all about.*

There are obvious reasons why *Thinking In Pictures* should be of interest to Appalachianists, filmmakers, folklorists and other students of the narrative arts. It also concerns the role of the creative leader in any complex collective enterprise. A director, particularly an independent director like John Sayles, is concerned with resolving the real and the ideal: making effective use of limited resources, knowing how to make practical plans, adapting to changes

and still coming up with results that are artistically, technically and financially rewarding.

By modern standards, *Matewan* is considered a low-budget film. Sayles had seven weeks and just under four million dollars to realize a project which had taken years of arduous effort by his producers to finance. Creating and sustaining positive emotional investment in a collective project is the basis of Sayles' philosophy of leadership. Like Eliot Wigginton, he recognizes that alienation is the true enemy of excellence and that involvement in meaningful work can be one of life's greatest pleasures:

> *You work that hard for that long with people and the production isn't just what you do for a living, it become your life, the people working with you become your community. The strangest and nicest thing during shooting was that even though all of us were neck-deep in the technical demands of making the movie, of creating the illusions that would eventually tell the story, the story would sometimes pull us out of all that and make us pay attention and make us think about what had brought us all together.*

Thoughtful, lucid and unpretentious, *Thinking In Pictures* is not just about making a movie; it's really about working, thinking and growing. Worthwhile reading.

# Review

## *Storming Heaven*

**by Denise Giardina**
**W.W. Norton & Company**
**New York, 1987**
**$16.95 (hardcover)**

Laurie Lindberg

High on the list of hazardous occupations is that of the coal miner. Anyone who has worked in a mine can give numerous chilling examples of the dangers faced every day. Ironically, those who have dared to claim the right to safer working conditions and benefits appropriate to the risks inherent in the job have found themselves facing yet another deadly hazard—the hostility of mine owners and operators.

In her novel *Storming Heaven*, Denise Giardina illuminates a little-known chapter in history, the conflict between miners and mine owners that culminated in the Battle of Blair Mountain in 1921. Although reared and educated in West Virginia, Giardina had never heard of that battle, which she discovered had involved 10,000 miners pitted against not only the mine owners and their mercenaries, but also against the federal government itself, which provided bombs, guns and poison gas to subdue the strikers. Giardina's research for the book was careful and extensive, and the major events of the novel are based firmly on documented evidence.

Despite its basis in fact, the book doesn't read like a history, nor even like most historical novels, because its author wisely chose to narrate the story in the voices of her major characters. Reading *Storming Heaven* is like listening to four people one might have known, people talking not to an audience, or even to each other, but to themselves. The voices of these characters are unselfconscious, natural, authentic. And Giardina has done a wonderful job of capturing the dialect of Appalachia.

At the heart of the novel is Clabe Lloyd's boy Rondal, who learns early about the mining life when he must leave school at age 10 to work alongside his daddy in the mines. Experiencing firsthand the long, dangerous hours in the mine and the salary that left most miners unable to provide for their families' needs, Rondal becomes convinced that the only hope of improving the miners' lot is the union. Even after he witnesses the murder of a union organizer thrown alive into a blazing furnace as a lesson to all who would support the union, Rondal remains committed to the establishment of that union.

Another of the book's narrators, Carrie Bishop, has her own mission: to relieve suffering and preserve life. Half convinced that her scornful father was right when he predicted that she was a girl too ugly and stubborn and independent ever to marry, Carrie grows into a delightfully unconventional woman who makes good use of her intelligence, common sense and compassion through her chosen profession of nursing. Although other mountain folk migrate thankfully to the cities, Carrie says, "I have travelled outside the mountains, but never lived apart from them. . . . There is enough to study in these hills to last a lifetime." No sooner does Carrie recognize the justice of the miners' cause than she makes that cause her own.

Possibly because she herself lived as a child in a West Virginia coal camp, Giardina is particularly sensitive to the unusual challenges faced by the inhabitants of the camps. She tells us of Vernie Lloyd, who cultivated flower boxes filled with red and white petunias, and every day "splashed the petals with water and gently wiped them clean with a dry cloth"; of the typhoid which spread rapidly among the residents of the camp; and of a diet consisting mainly of beans, gravy and cornbread.

Besides vividly depicting a way of life, *Storming Heaven* examines some of the difficult decisions that the coming of the coal industry forced the people of Appalachia to make. For Miles Bishop, who hates farming, the choice is easy: he is delighted to ally himself with the Boston mine owners who recruit him to manage their mines. But increasingly Miles realizes that allegiance to the owners involves him inevitably in the crimes of exploitation and violence that his employers commit against the people. For Albion Freeman, a minister, the choice is never easy; he believes in charity and non-violence, but his commitment to freedom and justice for the workers leads him into situations where violence seems the only recourse. Even Carrie Bishop, whose vocation is healing, finds herself wielding a machine gun in a desperate effort to save the striking miners from slaughter at the hands of the mine owners' hired gunhands.

*Storming Heaven* is a book about the politics of land ownership, about the conflict between rich and poor, about the human longing for love and justice and freedom. It's a war story and a love story. It's a compelling look at memorable characters caught up in a life-and-death struggle, the results of which can be seen today. "Progress," claims Rondal Lloyd, "is always at somebody's expense." Denise Giardina's novel shows quite clearly at whose expense the "progress" brought about by the coming of coal to Appalachia was achieved, and it raises poignant questions about the ulitmate value of such progress.

*Laurie Lindberg is a professor of English and teacher of Appalachian literature at Pikeville College, Ky.*

## *Diamond Jenny #5 Mistress Mine*

He spends his day-nights
Moving within her darkness.
She, rounded and beautiful,
Older than memory,
Larger than our lives,
Dangerously moist
And deep,
Like all women keeps her
secrets,
Her treasure
Tucked away, deep inside.
Her hold on our lives
Is complete.
My days and nights are filled
With waiting
And the fear
She may someday choose
Not to return him
To me.

—Jane Hicks

*Jane Hicks writes poetry and teaches at Dobyns-Bennett High School in Kingsport, Tenn.*

# Review

## *Like A Family. The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World*

**by Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, James Deloudis, Robert Korstad, Mary Murphy, Lu Ann Jones and Christopher B. Daly.**
**University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1987**
**$34.95 (cloth) $12.95 (paper)**

Marie Tedesco

*The cotton mill people was about the lowest class of people there. They called them linthead. . . . Well, cotton mill people didn't worry about it, they were the best people in the world. . . . They love to do things for people. And they don't take nothing off of people. People come and want to give them a dirty deal, they don't take it. They just fight for theirself.*

George Shea, former mill worker
Charlotte, North Carolina

Cotton mill workers saw themselves as a group apart. *Like a Family* details and analyzes mill and community life in the Piedmont region of the South. Relying extensively on interviews of workers conducted by members of the Southern Oral History Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the book tells the workers' story from their own perspective. In many respects, as the authors explain in the preface, this work represents a conscious effort to extend the 1940s work of such regional sociologists as Harriet L. Herring, Jennings J. Rhyne, Liston Pope and John Kenneth Moreland.

The book also re-examines the disparaging portrait of the mill worker drawn by Wilbur Cash in his influential 1941 work, *The Mind of the South*. Cash saw the mill worker as a "pitiable social type, stunted by poverty and isolation." *Like a Family* makes it clear that millhands were not pathetic, passive creatures, but rather were resilient, proud people who actively sought to improve their lives.

*Like a Family* is at once both analytical and compassionate. The book cuts across traditional disciplinary lines and can be read with profit and enjoyment by those interested in the working class, textiles and women in the South.

Part 1 covers the period from 1880-1920 and centers on the development of the cotton mill world. Part 2 focuses on the period from 1920-35, a time when the textile industry underwent many changes, especially those involving the shift to "scientific management" inspired by the work of Frederick Taylor and stimulated by the post-World War I textile recession. The book ends with the General Textile Strike of 1934 which signalled the disintegration of the mill village world.

The family metaphor is central to the book. Workers used the metaphor to describe village life and the relationships of workers to one another. Within this familial world the roles of women and children were particularly important, even though these roles followed a sexual division of labor based on hierarchies of sex and age common on the farm and in mills established elsewhere. Women were weavers and spinners who were expected to be patient and careful—as they were in the domestic sphere. Children were at the bottom of the hierarchy and performed the most menial tasks. Men, supposedly strong and authoritative, performed jobs that were "heavy" or involved supervision.

The familial world of the mill was a white world which reflected the segregation of Southern society. Blacks were excluded from production jobs, even though in the antebellum South slaves had worked in the spinning and weaving rooms. Black males performed only the heaviest and dirtiest work. They moved bales of cotton or worked in the picker room. Black females, however, were almost entirely excluded from the mill. Occasionally they might be found cleaning bathrooms and mopping floors.

Family relations dominated village life. Families recruited kin to work in the mill. Sharing and mutual aid among families characterized life.

But all was not rosy. Frequently men, used to being their own bosses, resented subjecting themselves to the authority of foremen and mill owners. Chafing at being dominated, men in turn tried to dominate their wives and children. Women, for their part, took on the double burden of mill work and domestic work. It's no surprise, then, that many mill women—like their rural ancestors—looked with ambivalence to marriage and family.

Mill owners' attempts to fulfill the tenets of scientific management led them to cut wages and demand increased productivity ("stretch-out") from the mill hands. Such tactics, or "hard rules" as the authors refer to them, led to a wave of strikes in 1929. Defeat in the strikes and the ensuing Depression led to further wage cuts and "stretching out the stretch-out." When it became apparent that the National Recovery Administration and its textile code were not going to prevent wage cuts and stretch out from "code-chiseling" owners, workers organized into unions and struck again in the 1934 General Textile Strike. But the strike ended in defeat and in disillusionment with both unions and government.

In the wake of further New Deal legislation which diminished the South's competitive (low-wage) advantage, the company mill town lost its advantage. Such companies as Burlington Mills began selling their villages. As the authors emphasize, many workers had ambivalent feelings about the dismantling of the company towns. One retired worker, for example, lamented that "People misses a lot by not having community . . . now you're scattered. You work maybe one place, then work way out yonder, and you don't get close to nobody."

In the end the familial world of the mill and village was broken apart by economic forces, the Southern mill owner's desire for continued high profits being foremost among these forces. Retired workers looked back at their lives in the mills with mixed feelings. They had many memories that were good ones. But many millhands perhaps agreed with George Dyer, who in summarizing his life in the mills of Charlotte had this to say:

*The corporations take advantage of people. They can do it because they can. That's the reason they do it, they can and they get away with it. It say "Justice for All," and it ain't justice for all. It's justice for some. . . . The man's got money, he can get what he wants, the man ain't got it can't do nothing. The man's got money, got power. That's about all I have to say.*

*Marie Tedesco is public service archivist at ETSU's Archives of Appalachia and has written about the rayon plants in Elizabethton, Tenn.*

# Review

***Headwaters* television is Appalshop's broadcast television division, producing seven half-hour programs each year on the culture and social concerns of Appalachia and rural America. Programs have been shown on public TV in the region and are available on various video formats. They are all in color, run 28:30 minutes and cost $150 each. Two of the 13 shows in the series are reviewed here.**

## *Mud Creek Clinic*

**directed by Anne Johnson**

Mary Swaykus

*Mud Creek Clinic* tells the story of the Mud Creek Health Project, as it was originally known, a health care facility which has existed since 1972 to serve the people living in the southern end of Floyd County, Ky. The film is cast in a retrospective mode, opening at the groundbreaking of the clinic facility in 1983, then looking back to trace the project's history.

The filmmakers interview people who live on the creek, especially the old pioneers who organized to fight for available, affordable health care. Their anecdotes and the narration give a history of the effect a determined few had when they applied union organizing techniques, including picketing, to pressure self-serving local and state officials into equitable distribution of federal funds. The result, as one narrator put it, "demonstrated what health care as a right would look like."

Featured in the film is Eula Hall, a hillbilly woman who grew up in hard times and who was determined to have better for her neighbors and her family. Eula, as the film relates, did not live on the creek all her life but traveled up North and saw that people lived differently and had rights. Although she rejected the different way of life and returned to her mountains, she returned with a growing conviction of her and her neighbors' rights to self-determination, their right to receive the social benefits due them, and their right to health care. Her determination, hard work and dedication is portrayed as the moving force behind many of the social advancements in the area, specifically the existence of the Mud Creek Clinic.

Notably absent from the film is any mention of the work, dedication and sacrifices made by "outsiders." Non-Appalachians, especially Elinor Graham, M.D., were the actualizing force of the clinic; without them it would have remained a dream of the impoverished local people.

Graham had been a VISTA worker in the area in the 1960s. She was so impressed by the health needs that she entered medical school. Then, with her husband James Squire, M.D., she returned to organize and begin the clinic. When I came in 1975, the Drs. Graham-Squire were being paid $10,000 each to provide health care at the clinic, run a pediatric clinic part-time, and take care of those patients who needed admission to the hospital. From the clinic's inception until at least 1980, all the professional health care staff were non-Appalachians. It was only because of their presence and sacrifice that Mud Creek Clinic became and remained more than a wish. They kept it operating and growing despite the infighting and power struggles which marked the local political/community board structure.

The idea of presenting this television series about the region is laudable—it provides both perspective on what battles have been waged and how much more needs to be done. The series would be stronger if an honest story were told.

*Mary Swaykus, M.D., is an Assistant Professor of Family Medicine at the Kingsport Family Practice Center. She was a physician at the Mud Creek Health Project from 1975-1977.*

For more information, call or write:

APPALSHOP FILMS
306 Madison Street
Whitesburg, KY 41858
(606) 633-0108

## *Frontier Nursing Service*

**directed by Anne Johnson**

Jo Ann Crawford

This show offers a delightful portrait of Mary Breckinridge's Frontier Nursing Service as it was in its infancy. The video affords a look into the history of the health care agency and, equally interesting, a pictorial history of the people and culture of rural Eastern Kentucky during the early 20th century.

Included are excerpts from the original documentary, "The Forgotten Frontier" filmed in 1929 by Mary Breckinridge's cousin, Marvin Breckinridge. Ms. Breckinridge narrates these portions, describing the difficulties encountered during the year spent making the documentary: crossing flood-swollen rivers, climbing treacherous mountain terrain on horseback and filming actual childbirth scenes in the cabins of mountain people.

In all instances, the film portrays the people of this rural community as they went about life, and the role of Frontier Nursing Service as it supported that life. Though some portions of the film are reenactments, the people of the community served as "actors" for the original documentary.

Included is an interview with one of the original nurses of the Frontier Nursing Service who also "starred" in Marvin Breckinridge's film. She reflects on her experiences with the people in

Courtesy of Frontier Nursing Service

**Mary Breckinridge, founder of the Frontier Nursing Service.**

# Review

the community and with Mary Breckinridge.

The videotape does not include demographic data, founding date or stated goals of the Frontier Nursing Service. However, the reality of the goals was made alive and obvious by the very nature of the film. The absence of the demographic data was more than offset as I observed the Frontier Nurses in action and interaction with the community they served.

As I viewed this filmed history, I thought of other health care programs in rural Eastern Kentucky. As a nursing student at Berea College, I participated in a similar program and gained insight into the reasons for success or failure of such programs. Often, the basic goals were the same or similar to those of Mary Breckinridge: to improve health awareness and health care practices. Obviously, Mary Breckinridge was successful. The Frontier Nursing Service exists today with offices in Hyden, Ky., and clinics in surrounding counties. Statistics I have gathered indicate that health care there has been improved. For example, the maternal and infant mortality rates have been significantly reduced in the population served by the Frontier Nursing Service.

The original and continued success of FNS is due to respect for the culture and its people—as opposed to programs entering the rural community to teach "those" people or to alter their culture. Mutual learning was encouraged and anticipated. The nurses on the videotape spoke as often of what they had gained as what they had given.

This videotape will be of special interest to nursing students or nurses, especially those with an interest in public health or midwifery. Persons interested in establishing health care programs in various cultural settings might also gain insight. To those of us who hold a special pride in our heritage, this film offers pictures from the past.

*Jo Ann Crawford is a nurse at the Veterans Administration Medical Center at Mountain Home, Tenn. She has had work published in nursing education journals.*

Courtesy of Archives of Appalachia, East Tenn. State University

## *Kingsport, Tennessee: A Planned American City*

**by Margaret Ripley Wolfe**
**University of Kentucky Press, Lexington, Kentucky 1987**
**$24.00 (hardcover)**

Edward L. Ayers

If they recognize the name at all, outsiders recognize Kingsport only as one of the Tri-Cities tucked into the northeastern corner of Tennessee. But for decades Kingsport seemed set apart, the beneficiary of a special destiny. The small city had been planned from the ground up near the turn of the century by a small band of Northern and Southern businessmen. Those men had attempted to build what residents used to call "the model city," a mixture of balanced industry, enlightened business, good housing, organized recreation and city planning. They hoped to offer the residents of the Holston Valley and the surrounding hillsides the opportunity for good wages and to offer factory owners an "Anglo-Saxon" work force not likely to strike or cause trouble. Both got what they wanted—at least for a while.

The 1910s and 1920s saw the town grow rapidly into a small city, an eager participant in all the changes of those heady years. The founding fathers fleshed out their plan, and hospitals, department stores and movie houses attracted more and more people to Kingsport. A key event in the town's history occurred in the early twenties, when Kingsport managed to attract Eastman Kodak to its ranks of industries. The city then possessed factories to produce not only chemicals, but also cement, paper and books. Wealthier residents began to adopt the trappings of affluent America, and elite subdivisions and golf courses grew in the mountainous setting.

The Great Depression and World War II brought the same hardships Americans of all kinds suffered, but the city itself came out of the war stronger than ever. It was in the late 1940s and 1950s that the city reached its peak. Business boomed, the population grew rapidly, development raced ahead, and Kingsporters confidently considered themselves the leaders of the Tri-City area. But it was also then that the seeds of Kingsport's decline were sown. City leaders, like their counterparts all over America, allowed virtually unrestricted growth along Kingsport's Golden Mile. East Stone Drive, the focus of much of this development, is no longer a mile, nor is it golden; rather it is a driver's nightmare and a magnet pulling business away from the original downtown area. That downtown, as late as the 1960s a thriving, attractive and distinct reminder of the best of the city's heritage, is now given over largely to furniture stores and parking spaces. The mall has become the place in town where one is most likely to meet friends and neighbors. In all of this, of course, Kingsport is not alone. The difference was that Kingsport had a chance to be something better and gave it away.

Margaret Ripley Wolfe, a native and resident of the Kingsport area as well as a professional historian, tells this story well. While the first part of the book is a relatively straightforward account of the city's origins, the latter parts are fired with passion and controlled indignation. The hope that Kingsport can regain its special and unique destiny seems to smolder beneath the surface, and that is a hope that anyone who cares about the model city cannot help but share.

*Edward L. Ayers is associate professor of history at the University of Virginia, where he teaches Southern history. He grew up in Kingsport.*

# Hooking Past To Future—with Rugs

**Pauline B. Cheek**

In the 1920s Belvia Ramsey of Madison county, N.C., acquired a rug-hooking machine. Cutting up long johns, the young bride made rugs that she bartered for baby clothes in nearby Asheville. Ten years later, Ramsey was working full-time as an independent rug broker, supplying craftspeople in the mountains with materials and hauling finished rugs to Asheville branches of New York-based rug wholesalers. "I handled a payroll that averaged from $80,000 to $100,000 a year," remembered Mrs. Ramsey. "That was big business for Madison County."

Hooking rugs has been a way of recycling worn-out clothing since colonial days. Narrow cloth strips or heavy yarn were worked through a burlap backing with a metal hook. Later a hinged wooden tool made the work easier.

In the 1920s, hand-hooked rugs enjoyed a renaissance as part of an Appalachian folk crafts revival. "Law, they were making little cotton rugs back up every holler," remembered one of my informants. Enterprising craftswomen recruited girls from the community—and their own children—to cut off sock tops, dye yarn and hook. Husbands constructed rug frames and trucked rugs to distributors or to roadside stands.

A three by five foot rug would bring about 50 cents. By putting in eight to 10 hour days, families could earn as much as $100 a week.

John Campbell, Mars Hills College

**Sisters Nobie Brackens and Betty Shelton hook a rug on their front porch, 1987.**

The income from rug making allowed an improved standard of living. Rug hooker Jakie Robinson Bailey explains, "Now, this house didn't have no bathroom or electricity. We'd borrow money from the FHA when we got water and other improvements, and we'd pay it back $100 a year—all with rug money."

Locally-owned factories sprang up and coexisted with the cottage industry. The Madison Rug Shop employed 100 people and helped to make Mars Hill, N.C., the center of the hand-hooked rug industry in the 1930s. As many as 10,000 finished rugs a week were shipped out by truck and train to department stores and wholesalers.

During the Depression rug money came to mean survival. Pansy Edwards Arrowood, a former employee of the Madison Rug Shop, said, "If it hadn't been for that Rug shop, I don't know what we'd a-done. There was no place else around here to work."

By the 1940s business was so brisk that New York firms opened their own factories in Asheville, a development that contributed to the demise of the Madison Rug Shop in 1942. Soon, however, the larger concerns were having difficulties because of changes in wage/hour and child labor laws. Manufacturers turned to the less restrictive environment of Puerto Rico. The rug hooking industry all but disappeared in Western North Carolina.

But like any endeavor which becomes a warp-thread in the life of a community, rug hooking did not disappear from the memories of those who had been involved with it. In the past 10 years I have talked to more than 200 people who had been a part of the rug industry. This project has resulted in a permanent exhibit at Mars Hill College's Rural Life Museum and a booklet entitled *Hooking Past to Future by Hand*. My oral history project also helped to reawaken interest and scores of area people have taken up the craft again.

Courtesy of the Southern Appalachian Photographic Archives, Mars Hill College.

**Children cutting sock tops for hooked rugs, Mars Hill, North Carolina. Photo by Doris Ulmann in the 1930s.**

Distribution and marketing, however, are problems. As veteran rug hooker Mrs. Nobie Brackens observes, "If we just had a market, we could supply thousands (of rugs) to big department stores. It would be the best thing that could happen for this county."

*Long time Mars Hill, N.C., resident Pauline Cheek is currently enrolled in the Peace and Justice Program at the Earlham School of Religion in Richmond, Ind.*

*Alice Anthony (photo page 19) recently graduated with an M.F.A. from ETSU. She is a part time instructor and is building her color portfolio.*

SPECIAL

Are you wasting your time with Jane? Keep fit the way we do in Appalachia.

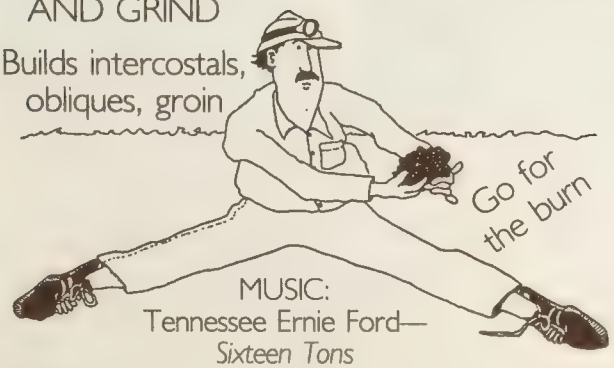
## The Gertie Nevels

# Appalachian Workout

People aren't supposed to be lying around on the floor anyway.

COAL LUMP AND GRIND

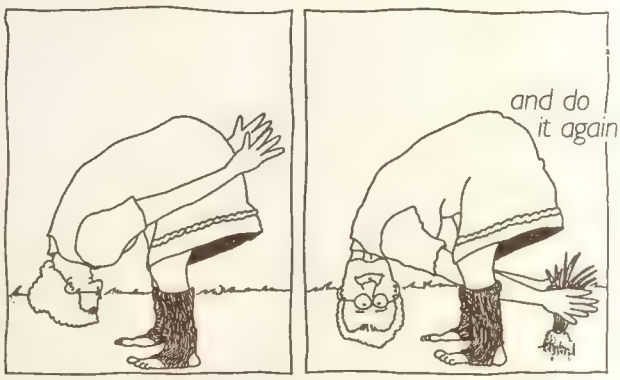
Builds intercostals, obliques, groin




MUSIC: Tennessee Ernie Ford— *Sixteen Tons*

PULLING WEEDS

Stretches spine, builds biceps and eliminates dandelions




MUSIC: *Roll Me Over in the Clover*

FETCH AND CARRY

Walk fast and balance your bucket with a dumbbell. Builds cardiovascular system, works out all major muscle groups

MUSIC: Elvis Presley— *Milkcow Blues Boogie*

BUTTER BURN

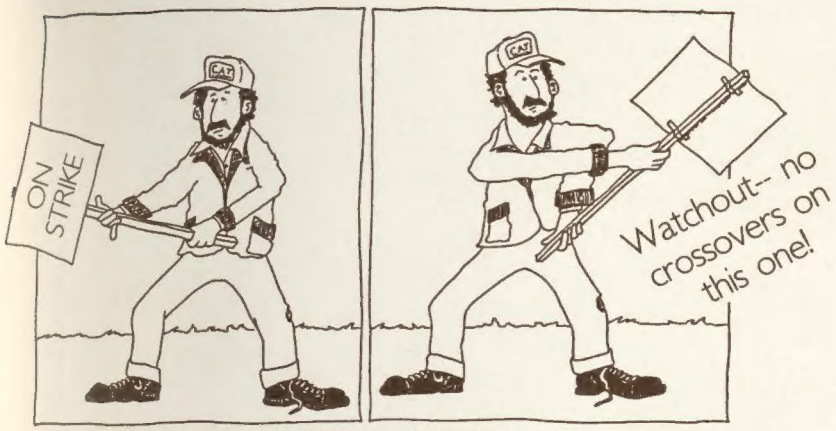
We build biceps the old fashioned way-- we churn it!

MUSIC: Buck Owens— *I've Got a Tiger by the Tail*

Wear a fancy leotard for inspiration

Tiger 'tard by K-Mart

# YOU CAN WORK OUT EVERY DAY, NO MATTER WHAT




WAIST TWISTS

Builds deltoids, triceps, solidarity

MUSIC: Florence Reece—*Which Side Are You On?*

WATER 'ROBIC

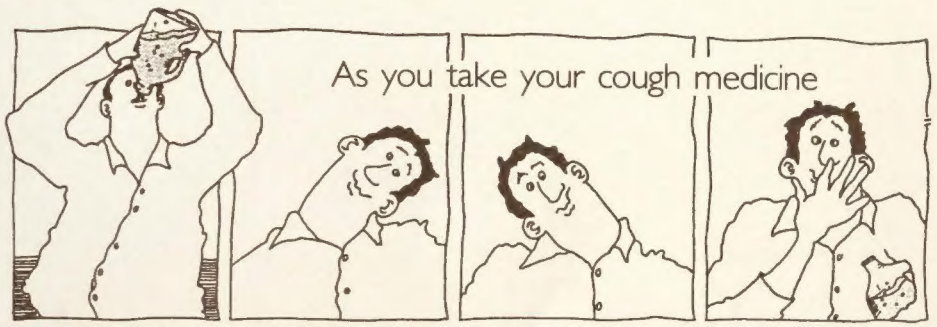
Builds heart and soul

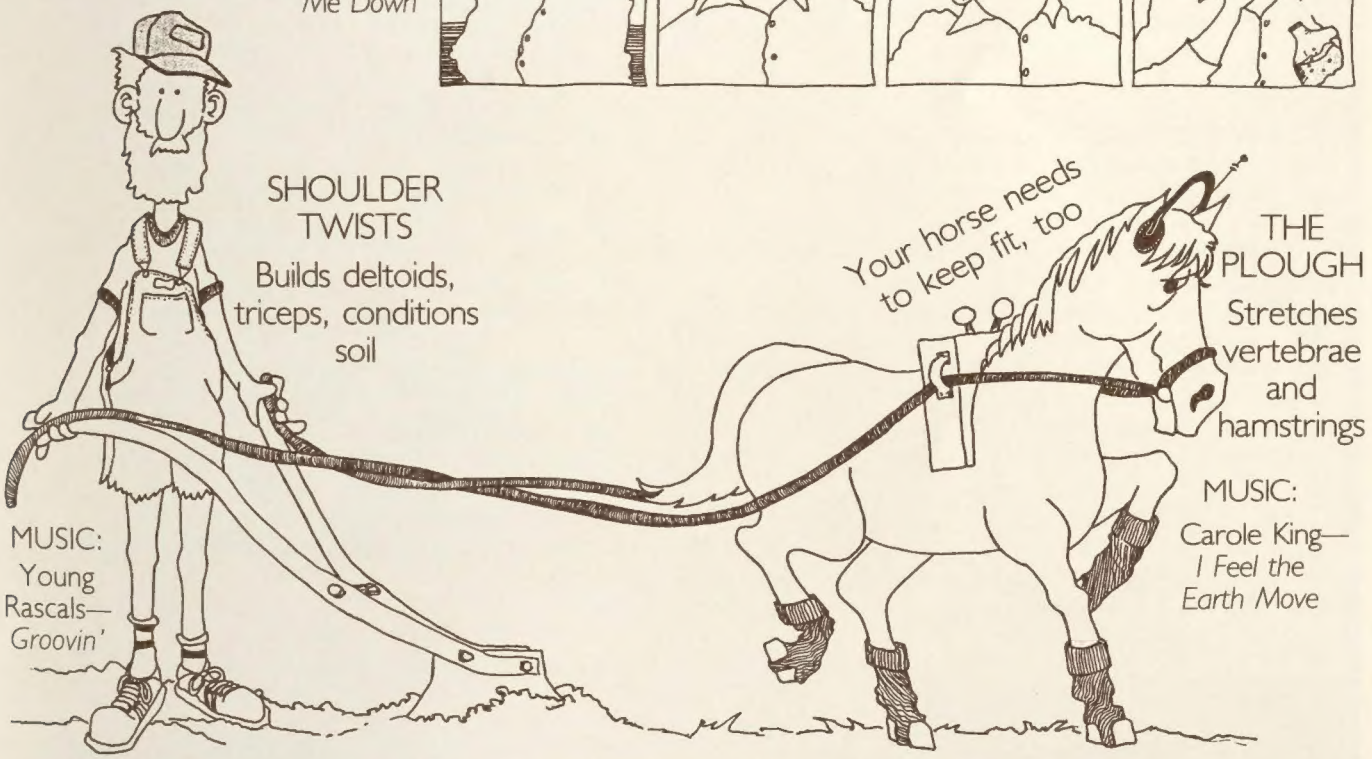
MUSIC: *Shall We Gather at the River?*

HEAD ROLLS

Cool down exercise, for loosening up

MUSIC: Merle Haggard—*The Bottle Let Me Down*





SHOULDER TWISTS
Builds deltoids, triceps, conditions soil
Your horse needs to keep fit, too
THE PLOUGH
Stretches vertebrae and hamstrings
MUSIC: Young Rascals—*Groovin'*
MUSIC: Carole King—*I Feel the Earth Move*

*—Art by Tony Feathers with copy assistance from Jo Carson and Pat Arnow*

***Tony Feather teaches art in Greene County, Tenn.***

## *The Runner*

On the cellar steps
I was telephone listener
watching rainbows roll into cold water.
White suds turned gray and vanished.
Clean wash rolled into a bushel.

Then - clothes sorter
cotton mounds covered the floor,
whites colors railroad steel mill.
I carried them to grandmother
in the right time and order.

In the morning sun - pin holder
clothes on her shoulders, my mother
held a shirt six pins two in her lips,
wooden cigars with no smoke.
We sidestepped across the bricks.
I held two more for the switch in my fist.

Now I'm the runner.
My grandmother in the cellar
magic fingers slip steaming clothes
through the wringer.
I carry the ready bushel to my mother
pass pins race the empty to the basement
for the next load
crawling through the wringers slit mouth
just in time.

Soon I will guide clean clothes to the bushel
be the clothes shaker sock hanger
maybe one day pole heaver
chief hanger wringer operator
moving up the line
in the business of Monday wash.

—Georgeann Eskievich Rettberg

## *Onions*

I cry
all day long
cutting onions in the restaurant
fourteen pounds julienned and sauteed
for six gallons of soup.

I am a woman
who knows
onions.

I know every layer
from the brown reptilian skin
to the glimmering interior,
holy of holies,
white Buddha.

I am a weeper
Like Mary.
Mary cries a river
John can dunk me in,
wash away the stains
of sin,
of sex,
of jaywalking.

One pound
chopped
for spaghetti sauce.

Tears
fall from my face
like white scales.

I walked to the altar when I was twelve
like some kind of nitwit
bawling
and praising God
so he wouldn't send me to Hell for hitting my cousin
with a brick.

I wanted to be a preacher
and talk about Jesus,
make people be good,
and my mom quit sending me to my room
but Brother Johnson said, "You're too little,
and a girl."

I'd rather cut onions, now
in a stainles steel kitchen,

for minimum wage
to slice and dice
the pungent Buddha,
white Christ
who loves crying women,
snivelling women,
women with mascara running down their faces
in dark
lines.

I am a woman who knows
onions.

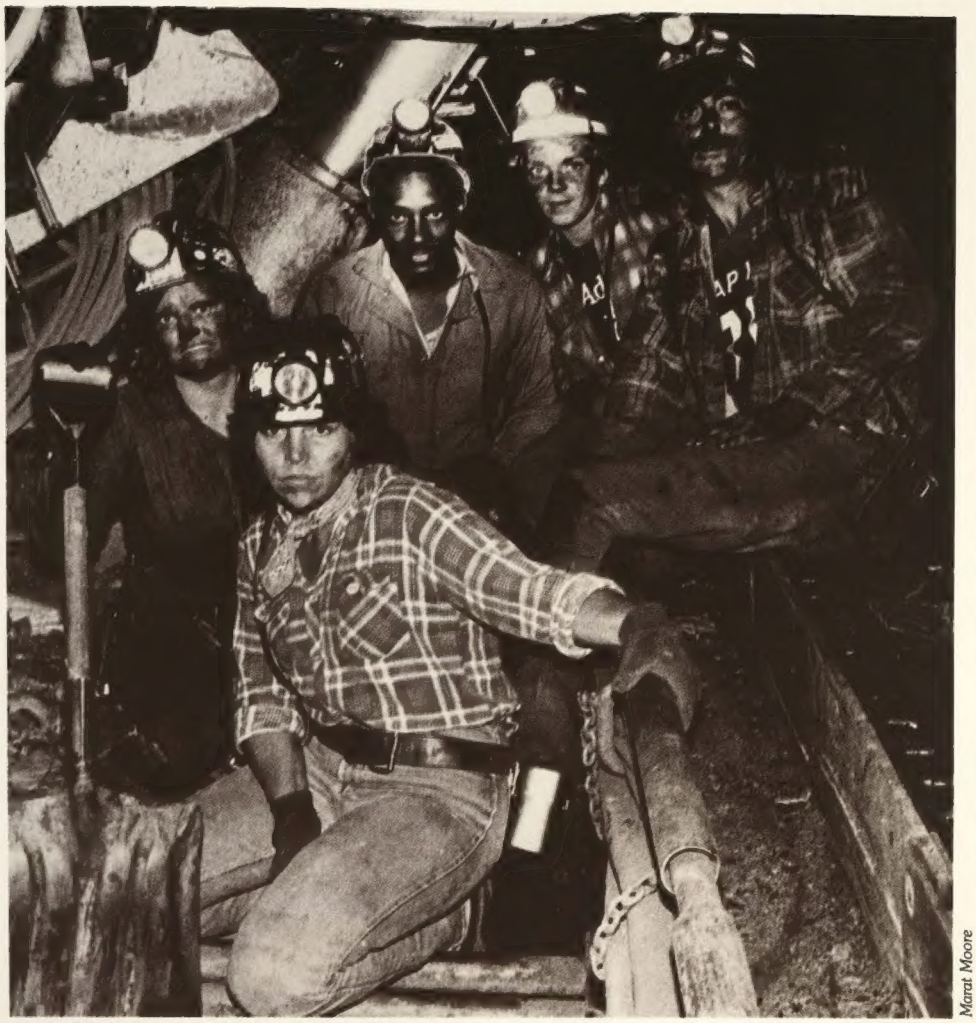
—Kelly Cogswell

*Kelly Cogswell is a student at Transylvania University in Lexington, Ky.*

# LIVES IN COAL

## Judy Cobb- Coal Miner

**Mary Alice Basconi**



Marat Moore

**Judy Cobb (second from right) and her mining crew, Wyoming County, W.Va., 1983.**

The distance from Cleveland, Ohio to Lynco, W. Va., can be measured not only in miles but in way of life. When Judy Cobb and her family made that move 12 years ago, she vowed to return to the city as soon as she graduated high school.

Instead, she became a coal miner. Family ties kept Cobb from leaving Wyoming County and its rugged hills. It is here she plans to build her house near the family homeplace at the foot of Huff Mountain.

At 27, Cobb is a slim blond with high cheekbones and capable-looking hands. She has worked as a fast-food chef and as a construction worker in Georgia—but mostly she's worked in the mines. She's been laid off three times in the last two years. Mine accidents have smashed her foot, broken her nose, and cost five of her teeth.

She doesn't mind the danger, although she says she's no longer the first to volunteer to work in the mine's face, where coal is severed from the seam. Here, a complex piece of equipment called a long-wall miner shears coal from a several-hundred-foot face.

"I'm classified as General Labor but I do a little bit of anything, everything. There's not much in the mines that I haven't learned how to run. And if they know you can run it, they'll put you on it," she says.

Cobb works second shift at Peabody-Eastern's Lightfoot No. 2 mine. After a five-month layoff last year, she and 21 other laid-off miners were called back. Her main job now is cleaning up spillage from an underground conveyor belt that brings coal to the surface. It is not a job that requires much training, but Cobb is glad to have work.

"I don't mind, and it's all what you make out of it, really. It seems like if I keep myself busy the time goes by faster. I'd prefer to be doing something else, but I'm just glad to be back to work. I would do, probably, anything. Whatever they tell me to do. I won't have any choice unless they post jobs and I can sign and get one.

"The mines aren't bad. I like it—the dirt and stuff, it don't bother me. Soap and water takes that off."

There are unpleasant aspects of the job for the only woman among about 200 men; she objects to vulgar talk from male co-workers. And there are certain miners who "still believe women should be at home, raising kids, keeping house," she says.

Yet she says her bosses have always given her a chance to prove herself. "I don't want special treatment," she says. "I haven't done anything to ask for special treatment."

Does she see herself as a life-long miner? Cobb is uncertain. A miner's income is hard to give up. When there's work, a miner can earn about $30,000 a year or more, she says.

"I really don't want to make the coal mines my life, but I might have to. There might not be nothing better for me to do. If they built that nuclear plant around here, I'd almost think about getting out from underground, if the money was right. I think that's what life's all about anymore, is money. It's shameful to say, but I guess that's what makes the world go 'round," she adds with a laugh.

"If I had to go out and find a job doing something else, somewhere else, I wouldn't know where to start. I look at myself. I'm not getting any younger, and the coal mines is what I've done."

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***Geneva Jenkins**, an ex-prisoner of war featured in our "Veterans" issue, died at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Los Angeles on February 8, 1988, at age 77. On the eve of World War II, Jenkins, a native of Sevier County, Tenn., was an Army nurse in the Philippines. For nearly three years she was a prisoner of the Japanese. She shared her memories of that time with Jane Woodside for **Now and Then**. She will not be forgotten.*

Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Neg. No. LC-USF 33-31106M2

**Selling watermelons from a wagon on the street on Saturday and court day, Jackson, Ky., September, 1940. Photo by Marion Post Wolcott for the Farm Security Administration.**


# NOW AND THEN

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